

# SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY

## THIS ISSUE

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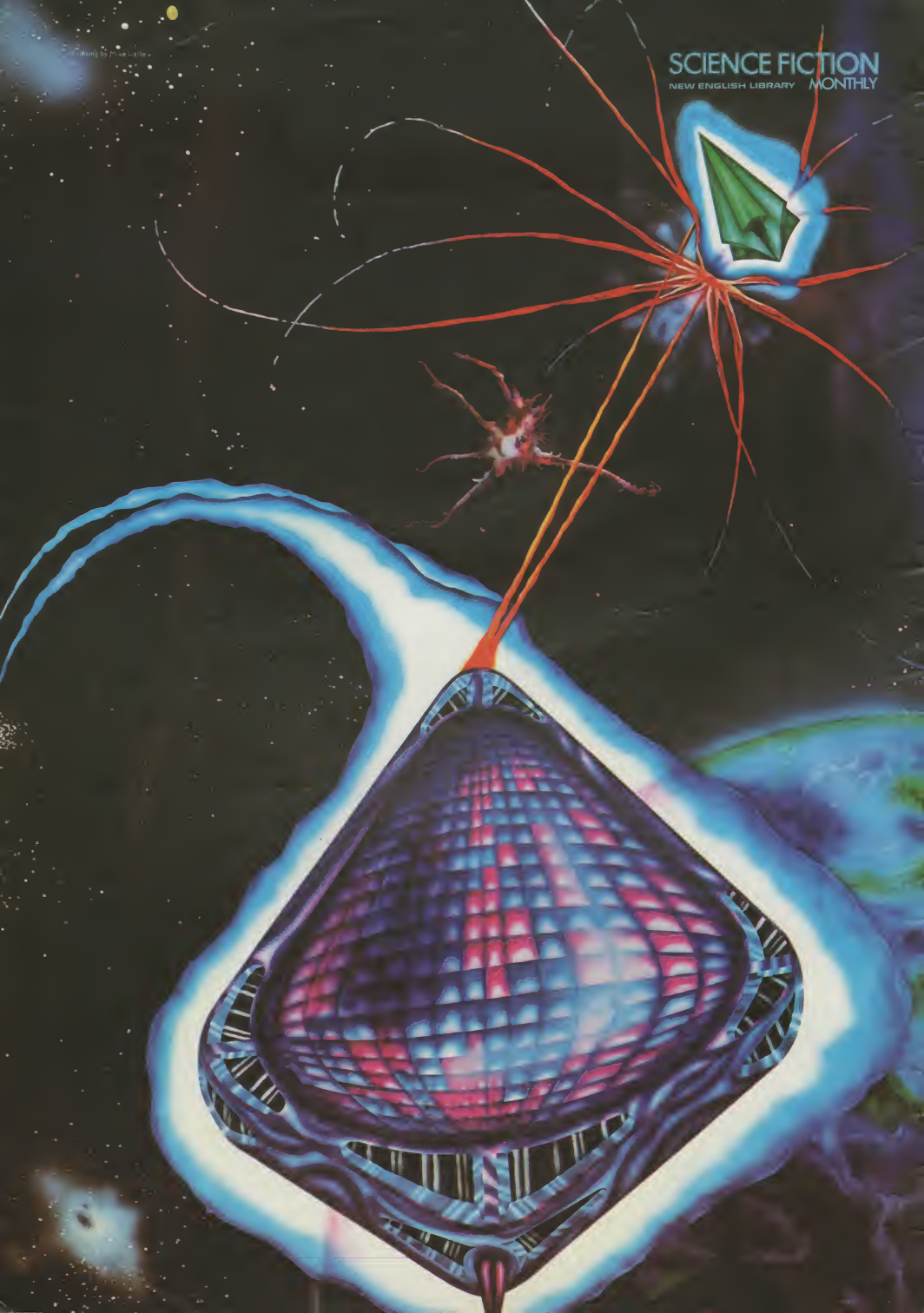
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## SCIENCE FICTION

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2 MONTHLY

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**T**here was no path. Harding picked his way cautiously through the trees, holding the gun tightly. "All clear so far," he whispered into the radio.

"Okay. Keep looking."

"No choice, have I?" His voice was sharp with nervousness. "Three men are gone, maybe dead. I don't want to be the fourth!"

"You won't be," somebody back at the ship promised. Harding wished he could feel so sure. He glanced down, fighting off a shudder of disgust. The Bouncer was still with him, a foot or so in front, matching his speed exactly. The urge to kill it there and then was almost too strong for him but somehow he resisted it.

The Bouncer was a flattened spheroid, about ten inches high, coloured a pale, sickly yellow. Its flesh appeared soft, pulpy and horrible, a criss-cross of veins showing just beneath its skin. The only visible external feature was a small eye-fringe near the top. It had no legs, and progressed by a series of short hops or bounces. It was leading Harding into the wood, which worried him. Each of the three missing men had followed Bouncers. None of them had returned. After the first few descriptions of the situation, all that had flashed over the air had been one brief, cryptic message from the second man. Then total silence.

"It's still here," Harding said, "guiding me. Or setting me up. I'm heading in the direction of Mackay's last radio-call." He heard a loud noise in the undergrowth and whirled round quickly. It turned out to be a false alarm. He grimaced and went on.

Experimentally, he made a grab at the Bouncer. It hopped out of reach, too swift for him. It was always the same; they wouldn't let anybody touch them. Intelligent, he decided. But how intelligent? Enough to lure three men to —

He tried not to think. The Bouncer slowed, until it was roughly a foot ahead of him again. He didn't bother with a second attempt at catching it. He wouldn't have succeeded.

A tiny insect dived past his head — only the fourth or fifth he'd seen, he realised. And he hadn't noticed even a single bird. That was strange in a wood as flourishing as this. Plenty of animals, yet no birds and few insects.

Not that it mattered, he thought, and pressed on. He continued without anything unusual occurring for several minutes. He started to breathe more evenly.

Suddenly the Bouncer left him. Without any warning it began to hop faster. It drew steadily away from him, a yard in front, two yards, three, four, — and then it disappeared into the undergrowth in front of him. His fingers tightened on the gun. His heart started to hammer. Straining his eyes, he tried to catch a glimpse of the Bouncer. But all he could see was a vague movement in the undergrowth. He seemed to be alone.

He whispered into the radio-mouthpiece. "It's gone.

The Bouncer's gone. It's a yard or so in front of me, but I don't know exactly where. God, it's creepy in these woods."

"Keep talking," urged the radio. "This is just how it happened with . . . well, you know what I mean."

"I know what you mean," His voice was heavy. "The thing's still in front of me. I can see the grass moving. Christ, I'm jumpy! The trees seem to be thinning out."

"This is it!" The radio-man's voice was high with excitement. "First the Bouncer leaves you, then the trees thin out, and then . . . sorry."

"So am I," said Harding, with feeling. His finger was trembling on the trigger. This was the moment of truth. This was how it had happened with the other three men. First the Bouncer had hopped away from them, and then they'd noticed a thinning-out in the trees. After that, they'd told of a clearing and a tree and . . . and that was all. Silence. All except for that one mysterious radio message.

Harding took four more steps forward, and saw that the trees were becoming more and more scarce. The leafage was less dense, so that he could see several yards in front. He took another six steps, until he was out in the open.

And then he stopped dead in amazement.

He was standing in a clearing, and in front of him stood a tree. The clearing had a grass-covered floor, with here and there some colourful forest-flower reaching skywards. Harding estimated that the clearing was at least fifty yards in diameter, and most of it was taken up by the tree. It was one of the largest trees he'd ever seen, and certainly the weirdest. He could see no trunk, for the leaves were too thick and the branches hung low. The ends of the lower branches met the ground, forming a great green canopy over most of the clearing. "Harding couldn't see through the outer leaves, and he could only guess at the girth of the central trunk. He estimated that its size must be colossal to support such a weight of branches. The leaves were huge and oval, and Harding guessed that each one was at least the length of his arm. He continued to stare at the tree for some time, speechless and surprised. The radio still chattered at him, but he didn't notice it. His mind was too much occupied with the tree. One of the branches of the tree was no more than five yards away from him, and his whole attention slowly came to bear on this nearest branch. He gazed at it in a kind of dazed fascination, for it made no sense.

Hanging in an orderly line from the branch were no fewer than twenty Bouncers. They were hanging upside-down, with their eye-fringes towards the ground. Harding thought they were asleep. He also thought they looked like a row of pale, fleshy fruits hanging from the branch. Briefly he wondered if the Bouncers missed in fact be vegetable rather than animal organisms, but he soon dismissed the thought as being ridiculous. He noticed something he hadn't seen before: there was another mark on the Bouncers,

# THE TREE IN THE FOREST

BY TERRY GREENHOUGH



just below the eye-fringe. This was a circular patch of dark colouration whose function escaped him.

He stood there for a while before regaining his senses. Then, slowly, he turned his mind to the radio. "Hello," he said at last, hearing the sigh of relief from the other end. "Sorry about the pause. I was surprised. I'm in a clearing, just like the others were. I can see that huge tree they described. There's a row of . . . wait a minute! This is something new!" His voice was sharp and excited.

A flash of movement caught his eye some thirty yards away around the edge of the clearing. He looked, blinked, then looked again. And still he was unsure whether his eyes were right. Only a stone's throw away from him, a solitary Bouncer was hopping steadily through the grass towards the tree. Behind it trailed a small quadruped which the survey-group had spotted in great numbers. The animal was following obediently where the Bouncer led . . . exactly as Harding himself had done. Exactly as the three missing men had done.

His grip relaxed on the gun and he tried to prepare himself for trouble. While he watched, the Bouncer led its victim right into the heart of the tree, completely out of sight. He reported the sighting to the ship. "The Bouncer and the animal have both gone into the middle of the tree. Everything's quiet. There's nothing . . . Good God!" Once again his voice lifted almost to a scream. "This is ridiculous. There are two more of them – another Bouncer and another quadruped. They're coming out of the tree, not in. It doesn't make sense. I don't think it's the same pair. They're – they're heading for the wood. They're going into the trees. They've gone." He shook his head in disbelief. First a Bouncer leading a – victim? – into the depths of the tree, and then another Bouncer leading another victim out into the woods. He shook his head again.

Then his mouth began to feel dry, and total fear overcame him. For this moment, he knew, might be one of the last in his life. This was the moment at which he had to take his search right into the heart of the mysterious tree. There was no turning back, and the only way to go was forward . . . forward into the very depths of the alien tree, into which, presumably, three of his colleagues had already ventured, never to return. It was a chilling prospect.

"I'm – I'm going in," he said hesitantly into the radio. As he walked towards the tree, he wondered what he might find within the cover of its monstrous branches. Death, perhaps? Probably the bodies of his colleagues. Or were they by some chance still alive? He didn't know. He couldn't guess. The only way to find out was to enter the tangle of branches and investigate the tree. He parted the foliage carefully and ducked under. And then the branches closed behind him and the outer world disappeared; he was alone in the mystery-world beneath the tree.

Hardly any sunlight filtered through. A dim twilight held sway over the scene, with the result that the shadows seemed to stretch and move and reach for Harding with long and ghostly fingers. He was afraid. There was not one central trunk but at least twenty small ones, and Harding now learned that the tree-mass was indeed a collection of average sized trees which had grouped together as if for company, finally growing into one vast conglomeration which had spread until it almost filled the clearing.

Or had it – no, the thought was crazy – had it perhaps actually made the clearing for itself, pushing back all the other trees so that it could huddle together in its own close-knit community? No, Harding told himself, that was silly. Trees didn't do such things. They didn't think, or plan, or organise their own lives. They simply grew.

Yet standing there beneath the branches, frightened of the shadows and apprehensive of every breath of wind that sighed through the leaves, Harding could almost bring himself to imagine a tree-like life-form that grew and planned and harboured evil thoughts and watched him search and wished him ill.

He bit his lip, for his mind was running amok. That way lay madness. There was no such thing as a sentient, malicious tree. Still, the existence of the tree-mass seemed to tie in somewhere with the disappearance of the three men from the ship.

His eyes grew more accustomed to the gloom. He looked around half-fearfully, almost dreading whatever he might see. Would it be the bodies of his colleagues? Holding the gun ready, he turned round full-circle, straining his eyes to pierce the dimness. A long way from him, away under the farther edges of the tree-mass, he thought he saw a group of low heaps or mounds, some five or six in number. They looked like bodies. Three of them could have been his friends, yet he thought it more likely that they were animals. One of the bodies suddenly got up, and Harding saw that it was a large

quadruped, which began to drag itself slowly towards the outer wood. It was limping badly and it looked in bad shape, and very shortly it had passed through the leaves and out of sight. A single Bouncer followed it closely.

Harding blinked, puzzled. So far, he'd been too engrossed with the mystery of the scene even to remember the existence of the radio. He was overdue for calling back to the ship. Cautiously, he began to walk in the direction of the remaining animals. But he never got there.

"Hello," he whispered into the transmitter. "I'm still here, in one piece. God knows what's going on! It's uncanny! No sign of the other three. I'm just –"

That was when they got him. The first he knew of it was a faint puffing sound and a tiny crack. It wasn't much of a sound in itself, but it was enough to warn him that he was in danger. It came from above him. He looked upwards and then he saw them.

Above his head hung a half-dozen or so sac-like objects, pale green in colour. He recognised them as some alien form of seed-pod. They were the size of footballs, and one of them had just burst. A shower of small, winged seeds was falling swiftly towards him. The shower reached him, drifting over his head and shoulders. He realised with a shock that the seeds had sharp barbs and points on them. Somewhat foolishly, he started to count them as they stuck into his face and throat. He counted to seven before he lost consciousness.

He was out for a long, long while.

When he came to, he couldn't open his eyes. He had the vague sensation that hours had passed while he lay there in the grass. His face and throat felt sore and swollen where the seeds had speared him. Dozens of them must have landed on him. Still his eyes wouldn't open. There was a pain in his right arm, but it didn't seem to matter much. He was dazed and delirious, and he knew it. Knowing it only made it worse to bear. His arm ached terribly, but it made no difference. He was lying on his back, his eyes closed.

He was hungry. Suddenly, idiotically, he felt hungry. He should have been worried about his own safety, yet his first coherent thought concerned his stomach. It was very silly. He realised that his mind was slipping. He was so damned hungry. He concentrated on thinking of food. And then he managed to open his eyes. If it hadn't been so horrible it might have been laughable.

The Bouncer was eating him. At least, it was sucking his blood. There was a small piece torn out of his right arm just below the elbow. The Bouncer was attached tightly to the wound, clinging on by a small round sucker-mouth. The creature's fleshy body was no longer pale. With each suck, Harding saw the round body shudder as with ecstasy, then turn a frightful red as his blood filled its surface veins. Harding felt sick. He was being leached, and he was helpless. He couldn't move. He found difficulty in thinking.

So this was what had happened to the others, he decided. Yet where were their dead, or perhaps still dying, bodies? Had the Bouncers eaten them completely? The fact stung. He tried to pull the winged seeds out of his flesh, but they wouldn't come. It wasn't any pain that prevented him pulling them out, for his facial pain seemed not quite so bad as it should have done. Perhaps the seeds held some numbing drug, he thought. Again he made an effort at pulling them out, and again he failed. He could feel little barbs sprouting in his flesh, below the skin-surface, stopping the seeds from leaving him. He knew that he would succeed in pulling his face off before he succeeded in removing the seeds.

Three more Bouncers were watching him. They were ranged in a tiny semi-circle round his feet, their eye-fringes trembling. They looked as if they were waiting for something. After a while Harding learned what it was they were waiting for.

At his arm, the nearest Bouncer stopped sucking. It hopped back, a ghastly scarlet in colour. It stopped a yard away, watching him. And then, while Harding reined in quiet terror, one of the other Bouncers took its place on his arm. It started sucking and once again Harding passed out. This time he felt grateful for oblivion.

Eventually he woke to half-consciousness. All four Bouncers were watching him. They were all a sickly red colour. Harding felt weak, and he wondered how much blood he'd lost. Could he make it back to the ship? Could he manage to fight off the Bouncers? Could he even stand up?

Yes, he could. He flexed the muscles of his legs, and after a few moments he managed to struggle to his feet. He expected the Bouncers to attack him, but they simply watched him without moving. Suddenly he remembered the radio. Then he felt sick again, because the radio had broken as he fell. His

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# Blue theme & fugue

by Robert Wells

**Z**ed woke up hearing blue. It was a colour never heard on Trathon Ten although Zed had been taught its theoretical existence during his incubation period. He sat up and listened intently.

The colour swirled and deepened. It was something completely new to him and his planet. His auditory sense throbbled with its beauty. If only he could get its source located he must inform the Controller immediately.

Then, in a flash of recollection, he remembered that the Controller and Trathon Ten and even his own familiar bed were millions and millions of times away; that the couch which contained and protected him was not home.

He saw the jarring tick of the cabin chronometer above and to his right, and focussed his optic nerve on it in an effort to control the sudden panic that gripped him. It passed. The beauty of the colour he could hear didn't diminish. In fact, now that the moment of fear was over, his calming senses seemed more responsive to its richness.

During pretranslation training he had learned from the Controller that he must be ready to encounter totally unfamiliar sensations in that other dimension it was his mission to explore.

The chronometer told him that he had slept for three periods and he deduced that this had been the duration of his journey. It was almost time to leave the capsule.

He presumed that the internal flight regulator would already have advised the Controller of his arrival at destination. He wondered whether it had been a signal from Trathon Ten which had roused him or just the rich, blue flood which was still penetrating the cabin.

He touched a button and watched the sonic instruments buzz into life. One after another he read them. They told him that the capsule door was still secured; that the surface environment was non-toxic, but that its g-force was hostile; that the capsule's presence did not appear to be manifest to native life forms.

Zed waited for the Controller's release. Until it came there was nothing for him to do but relax and enjoy the colour. It was obviously arriving at some sort of climax. It shaded sometimes to a

quivering transparency, plunged to depths of cobalt intensity and on into inky darkness, rising again through indigo punctuated with glyphs of pure turquoise to finish on a brush-stroke of ultramarine.

A moment later tiny sparks of orange and yellow erupted into the gap, scribbled toward Zed and broke like waves on his quivering nerves. But they were trivial after the purity of the blue sound.

"I see - what happened then?" The Controller's thought, boosted across the dark distances, was comforting to Zed in its link with home. Time had passed, contact had been established. Now the Controller took him through the customary period of interrogation.

"There was a whole symphony of brightness. It was too complex and dazzling to identify any dominant theme. As it developed, pure superimpositions emerged. There was a striking green more beautiful than our technical communication wavelength, thick daubs of crimson shading to mauve at one end of the spectrum, almost purple-black at the other; the intense blue again. Each one had its period of dominance then all merged again in one harmonious unity. It was . . . it was . . ."

"And now?" The Controller's chilly enquiry was aimed at bringing the explorer's flying imagination down from exaggeration to fact.

"I have isolated the capsule, but I believe that the manifestations continue outside."

"What do you deduce?"

Zed considered. "It's pure speculation, but whatever life form our uncrewed probes observed here employs colour in ways distinct from our own."

"Is it inimical do you suppose?" Zed fancied that the Controller sounded apprehensive. "Could it be interpreted as an attack on the vehicle?"

"The instruments evidence no local interest at all directed at the capsule. I feel that the native forms may be unable to detect it with whatever senses they have. The only reaction the colour provokes in me is purely aesthetic."

"Nevertheless, the *intention* may be hostile."

"If it doesn't actually harm," thought Zed, "I have no objection to full ex-

posure. Where do you read me?"

"You have, in fact, landed in a densely inhabited environment according to the preliminary plots. We have no very precise data to give you. There was a final error in the approach procedure and we had to abort during phase eight and put you down where we could. So you're off the scheduled target area. These colours you hear - don't you think they could be some sort of reaction to you?"

"If they are, I hear them as friendly," Zed telepathised. "How should I proceed?"

The Controller was silent for a long time. At last his ordered thought throbbled across space to the explorer on that other world. "I shall release the capsule door in ten trispacs. Institute Procedure Six. Act with extreme prudence and report fully to me in one decaperiod. Begin. Ten . . . nine . . . eight . . ."

Zed slipped comfortably into the exploration pod. The remote think-down continued. On the instant of zero the capsule hatch folded and slid aside. The pod moved ahead and Zed found himself in a bubbling ferment of colour.

For a moment the g-shock dragged his frame into violent old age, then the pod adjusted the pressure on him to Trathon Ten level.

Zed set his instruments in accordance with the procedure ordered, isolating until the great ocean of colour into which he had swum was dimmed sufficiently for him to get a hearing of his surroundings.

The expedition had landed him in an immense place of congregation. The uniform signals his external antenna picked up on a rapid sweep showed that the walls and roof were solid but were interrupted here and there with translucent material.

He logged the data carefully, then concentrated on the more interesting manifestations of mobile life which filled the hall. He tested a random sample, beaming the instruments on individuals in different parts of the building.

Signals showed the local life form to be of more or less uniform height, four-limbed, bi-pedal and stationary in repose. Isolated movement here and

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"THE MARTIAN WAY" Painting by [unreadable] Partner of Artist Partners.  
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### A Sonnet for the Seeds of Time

by John Brunner

On autumn days my schoolfellows and I  
would run to catch the seeds of sycamore  
like helicopters as they spiralled by.  
Some few sowed saplings on the copse's floor . . .  
while many died. Time too has seeds which die,  
but some sprout rainbow futures which before  
were less than guesswork. Prophets can't descry  
what shoots grow peace and love, which hate and war.  
Still, let us dream that through the hollow sky  
our fancied stellar argosies shall soar  
to Rigel and Arcturus. Let us try  
to make those dreams come true. There's hope in store  
that children of the Earth may walk between  
growths strange and marvellous, and unforeseen.

28 Oct 73

Lewis Orne, a man of great personal magnetism, is assigned to oversee the activities of a planet at the edge of a distant galaxy long torn by devastating wars. An interplanetary trouble-shooter, it is his assignment to monitor the planet; to detect at the earliest stages any sign of aggressiveness that might trigger still another exhausting conflict. Fulfilling these duties, he discovers extra-sensory powers of awesome potential. He is invited, because of his special powers, to join the company of the 'gods':

*To become a god, a living creature must transcend the physical. The three steps of this transcendent path are known. First, he must come upon the awareness of secret aggression. Second, he must come upon the discernment of purpose within the animal shape. Third, he must experience death.*

*When this is done the nascent god must find his own rebirth in a unique ordeal by which he discovers the one who summoned him.*

The Making of a God The Amel Handbook

Orne's rites of passage in the vast and perilous reaches of deep space provide an unforgettablely dramatic story with philosophical insights and human emotion.

An extract from the book by Frank Herbert, published by New English Library.

*Which is the better: a good friend, a good heart, a good eye, a good neighbour, a good wife, or the understanding of consequences? It is none of these. A warm and sensitive soul which knows the worth of fellowship and the price of the individual dignity—this is best.*

—BAKRISH AS A STUDENT TO HIS GURU

Why did you choose Bakrish to guide him in the ordeal?" Macrithy asked the Abbod.

They stood in the Abbod's study. Macrithy having returned to report that Orne had passed the first test. A smell of sulphur dominated the room and it seemed oppressively hot to Macrithy, although the fire had died in the fireplace.

The Abbod bowed his head over the standing easel, spoke without turning and without observing that Macrithy had coveted this honour for himself.

"I chose Bakrish because of something he said when he was my student," the Abbod murmured. "There are times, you know, when even a god needs a friend."

"What's that smell in here?" Macrithy asked. "Have you been burning something odd in the fireplace, Reverend Abbod?"

"I have tested my own soul in hellfire," the Abbod said, knowing that his tone betrayed his dissatisfaction with Macrithy. To soften this, he added: "Pray for me, my dear friend. Pray for me."

*The teacher who does not learn from his students does not teach. The student who sneers at his teacher's true knowledge is like one who chooses unripe grapes and scorns the sweet fruit of the vine which has been allowed to ripen in its own time.*

—SAYINGS OF THE ABBODS

You must sit in that chair," Bakrish said when they had finished praying.

He indicated the squat, ugly shape facing the barrier wall.

Orne looked at the chair, noted an inverted metallic bowl fitted to swing over the seat. There was present tension in that chair. Orne felt his heartbeats pumping pressure into this moment.

"Sometimes we go for the sake of going." The words rang in his memory and he wondered who had said them. The great wheel was turning.

Orne crossed to the chair, sat down.

In the act of sitting, he felt the sense of peril come to full surge within him. Metal bands leaped from concealed openings in the chair, pinned his arms, circled his chest and legs. He surged against them, twisting.

"Do not struggle," Bakrish warned. "You cannot escape."

"Why didn't you warn me I'd be pinned here?" Orne demanded.

"I did not know. Truly. The chair is part of the psi machine and, through you, has a life of its own. Please, Orne, I beg of you as a friend: do not struggle, do not hate us. Hate magnifies your

danger manifold. It could cause you to fail."

"Dragging you down with me?"

"Quite likely," Bakrish said. "One cannot escape the consequences of his hate." He glanced around the enormous room. "And I once hated in this place." He sighed, moved behind the chair and shifted the inverted bowl until it could be lowered over Orne's head. "Do not move suddenly or try to jerk away. The microfilament probes within this bowl will cause you great pain if you do."

Bakrish lowered the bowl.

Orne felt something touch his scalp in many places, a crawling and tickling sensation. "What is this thing?" he asked, his voice echoing oddly in his ears. And he wondered suddenly: *Why am I going through with this? Why do I take their word for everything?*

"This is one of the great psi machines," Bakrish said. He adjusted something on the back of the chair. Metal clicked. "Can you see the wall in front of you?"

Orne stared straight ahead under the lip of the bowl.

"Yes..."

"Observe that wall," Bakrish said. "It can manifest your most latent urges. With this machine, you can bring about miracles. You can call forth the dead, do many wonders. You may be on the brink of a profound mystical experience."

Orne tried to swallow in a dry throat. "If I wanted my father to appear here he would?"

"He is deceased?"

"Then it could happen."

"It would really be my father, alive . . . himself?"

"Yes. But let me caution you. The things you see here will not be hallucinations. If you are successful in calling forth the dead, what you call forth will be that dead person and . . . something more."

The back of Orne's right arm tingled and itched. He longed to scratch it. "What do you mean more?"

"It is a living paradox," Bakrish said. "Any creature manifested here through your will must be invested with your psyche as well as its own. Its matter will impinge upon your matter in ways which cannot be predicted. All of your memories will be available to whatever living flesh you call forth."

"My memories? But . . ."

"Hear me, Orne. This is important. In some cases, your *creatures* may fully understand their duality. Others will reject your half of the creation out of hand. They may not have the capacity to straddle this duality. Some of them may even lack sentience."

Orne felt the fear driving Bakrish's words, sensed the sincerity, and thought: *He believes this. That didn't make all of this true, but it added a peculiar weight to the priest's words.*

"Why have I been trapped in this chair?" Orne asked.

"I am not sure. Perhaps it was important that

you not run away from yourself." Bakrish put a hand on Orne's shoulder, pressed gently. "I must leave now, but I will pray for you. May grace and faith guide you."

Orne heard a swishing of robes as the priest strode away. A door banged with a hollow sharpness which lost itself in the giant room. Infinite loneliness penetrated Orne.

Presently, a faint humming like a distant bee sound grew audible. The psi amplifier in Orne's neck tugged painfully, and he felt the flare of psi forces around him. The barrier wall blinked alive, became a rich and glassy green. It began to crawl with iridescent purple lines. They squirmed and writhed like countless glowing worms trapped in a viscid green aquarium.

Orne drew in a shuddering breath. Fear hammered at him. The crawling purple lines held a hypnotic fascination. Some appeared to waft out of the wall toward him. The shape of Diana's face glowed momentarily among the lines. He tried to hold the image, saw it melt away.

*I don't want her here in this dangerous place, he thought.*

Shapes of deformity squirmed across the wall. They coalesced abruptly into the outline of a Shriggar, the saw-toothed lizard Chargonian mothers invoked to frighten their children into obedience. The image took on more substance. It developed scaly yellow plates and stalk eyes.

Time slowed to a grinding, creeping pace for Orne. He thought back to his Chargon childhood, to the terror memories, told himself: *But even then the Shriggar were extinct. My great-grandfather saw the last specimen.*

Memories persisted, driving him down a long corridor full of empty echoes that suggested insanity, drugged gibbering. Down . . . down . . . down . . . He recalled childish laughter, a kitchen, his mother as a young woman. There were his sisters screaming derisively as he cowered, ashamed. He had been three years old and he had come running into the house to babble in terror that he had seen a Shriggar in the deep shadows of the creek gully!

*Laughing girls! Hateful, little girls! "He thinks he saw a Shriggar." Hush now, you two. Amusement, even there in his mother's voice. He knew it now.*

On the green wall, the Shriggar outline bulged outward. One taloned foot extended itself to the floor. The Shriggar stepped fully from the wall. It was twice as tall as a man and stalked eyes swivelling right, left.

Orne jerked his awareness out of the memories, felt painful throbbing as his head movement disturbed the microfilament probes.

Talons scratched on the floor as the Shriggar took three investigative steps away from the wall. Orne tasted the sourness of terror in his mouth. He thought: *My ancestors were hunted by such a creature. The panic was in his genes. He recognized this as every sense focused on the nightmare lizard.*

Yellow scales rasped with every breath the thing took. The narrow, birdlike head twisted to one side, lowered. Its beak mouth opened to



reveal a forked tongue and sawtooth.

Primal instinct pressed Orne back in his chair. He smelled the stink of the creature—sickly sweet with overtones of sour cream and swamp.

The Shriggar bobbed its head and coughed: "Chunk!" Stalk eyes moved, centred on Orne. Orne taloned floor lifted and it plunged into motion toward the man trapped in the chair. The high-stepping lode stopped about four metres away. The lizard cocked its head to one side while it examined Orne.

The beast stink of the thing almost overpowered Orne's senses. He stared up at it, aware of painful constriction across his chest, the probing eyes.

The green wall behind the Shriggar continued to wriggle with iridescent purple lines. The movement was a background blur on Orne's vision. He could not shift his focus from the lizard. The Shriggar ventured closer. Orne smelled the fetid swamp ooze on its breath.

*This has to be hallucination, Orne told himself. I don't care what Bakrish said: This is hallucination. Shriggar are extinct. Another thought sneaked at him in the sway of the lizard's terrible beak: The priests of Amel could've bred zoo specimens. How does anyone know what's been done here in the name of religion?*

The Shriggar cocked its head to the other side, moved its stalked eyes to within a metre of Orne's face.

Something else solidified at the green wall. Orne moved only his eyes to discover what lay in this new movement.

Two children dressed in scanty sun aprons skipped onto the stone floor. Their footsteps echoed. Childish giggling rang in the vast emptiness of the domed room. One child appeared to be about five years old, the other slightly older—possibly eight. They betrayed the Chargon heaviness of body. The older child carried a small bucket and a toy shovel. They stopped, looked around them in sudden confused silence.

The smaller one said: "Maddie, where are we?"

At the sound, the Shriggar turned its head, bent its stalked eyes toward the children.

The older child shrieked.

The Shriggar whirled, talons scratching and slipping, lunged into its high-stepping lode.

In horrified shock, Orne recognised the children: his two sisters, the ones who'd laughed at his fearful cries on that long-ago day. It was as though he had brought this incident into being for the sole purpose of venting his hate, inflicting upon these children the thing they had dended.

"Run!" he shouted. "Run!"

But there was no moving the two children from their frozen terror.

The Shriggar swooped upon the children, blocking them from Orne's view. There was a childish shriek which was cut off with abrupt finality. Unable to stop, the lizard hit the green wall and melted into it, became wriggling lines.

The older child lay sprawled on the floor still clutching her bucket and toy shovel. A red smear marked the stones beside her. She stared across the room at Orne, slowly got to her feet.

*This can't be real, Orne thought. No matter what Bakrish said.*

He stared at the wall, expecting the Shriggar to reappear, but aware the beast had served its purpose. Without words, it had spoken to him. He saw that it had really been a part of himself. That was what Bakrish had meant. That thing was my beast.

The child began walking toward Orne, swinging her bucket. Her right hand clutched the toy shovel. She glared fixedly at Orne.

It's Maddie, he thought. It's Maddie as she was. But she's a grown woman now, married and with children of her own. What have I created?

Flecks of sand marked the child's legs and cheeks. One of her red braids hung down partly undone. She appeared angry, shivering with a child's fury. She stopped about two metres from Orne.

"You did that!" she accused.

Orne shuddered at the madness in the child voice.

"You killed Lauriel!" she accused. "It was you."

"No, Maddie, no," Orne whispered.

She lifted the bucket, hurled its contents at him. He shut his eyes, felt sand deluge his face, felt the bowl on his head. It ran down his cheeks, fell on his arms, his chest, his lap. He shook his head to dislodge the sand on his cheeks, and pain coursed through him as the movement disrupted the microfilaments connected to his scalp.

Through slitted eyes, Orne saw the dancing lines on the green wall leap into wild motion—bending, twisting, flinging. Orne stared

at the green and purple frenzy through a red haze of pain. He remembered the priest's warning that any life he called forth here would contain his own psyche as well as his own.

"Maddie," he said, "please try to under—" "You tried to get into my head!" she screamed. "I pushed you out and you can't get back."

Bakrish had said it: "Others may reject your half of the creation out of hand." Child Maddie had rejected him because her eight-year-old mind could not accept such an experience.

Realizing this, Orne recognized that he was accepting this occurrence as reality and not as hallucination. He thought: *What can I say to her? How can I undo this?*

"I'm going to kill you!" Maddie screamed.

She hurried himself at him, the toy shovel swinging. Light glinted on the tiny blade. It slashed down on his arm and pain exploded there. Blood darkened the sleeve of his toga.

Orne felt himself caught up in nightmare. Words leaped to his lips: "Maddie! Stop that or God will punish you!"

She drew back, preparing herself for a new assault.

More movement at the wall caught Orne's attention. A white-robed figure in a red turban came striding out of the wall: a tall man with gleaming eyes, the face of a tortured ascetic. Long gray hair parted in the Sufi style.

Orne whispered the name: "Mahmud!"

A gigantic tri-di of that face and figure dominated the rear wall of the inner mosque Orne had attended on Chargon.

*God will punish you!*

Orne remembered standing beside an uncle, staring up at that image in the mosque, bowing to it.

Mahmud strode up behind the child, caught her arm as she started another blow with the shovel. She twisted, struggling, but he held her, turning her arm slowly, methodically. A bone snapped. The child screamed and screamed and...

"Don't!" Orne protested.

Mahmud had a low, rumbling voice. He said: "One does not command God's agent to stop his just punishments." He lifted the child by the hair, caught up the fallen shovel, slashed it across her neck.

The screaming stopped. Blood spurted over his gown. He let the now limp figure fall to the floor, dropped the shovel, faced Orne.

Nightmare! Orne thought. *This has to be a nightmare!*

"You think this is a nightmare," Mahmud rumbled.

Orne remembered what Bakrish had said: if this creature were real, it could think with his mind. He rejected this thought. "You are a nightmare."

"Your creation has done its work," Mahmud said. "It had to be disposed of, you know. It was embodied by hate and not by love. You were warned about that."

Orne felt guilty, sickened and angry. He recalled that this test involved understanding miracles. "Was this supposed to be a miracle?" he asked. "This was a profound mystical experience?"

"You should've talked to the Shriggar," Mahmud said. "It would've discussed cities of light, the meanings of war, politics and that sort of thing. I will be more demanding. For one thing, I wish to know what you believe constitutes a miracle."

A fur of suspense enclosed Orne. Precient fear sucked at his vitals.

"What is a miracle?" Mahmud demanded.

Orne felt his heart hammering. He had difficulty focusing on the question, stammered: "Are you really an agent of God?"

"Quibbles and labels!" Mahmud barked. "Have you ever learned yet about labels? The universe is one thing! We cannot cut it into pieces with our puny expediencies. The universe exists beyond the labels!"

A tingling sense of madness prickled through Orne. He felt himself balanced on the edge of chaos. *What is a miracle?* he wondered. He recalled Emolride's didactic words: *chaos . . . order . . . energy. Psi equals miracles.*

*Words, more words.*

Where was his faith?

*I exist, he thought. That is enough.*

"I am a miracle," he said.

"Ohhh, very good," Mahmud said. "Psi focus, eh? Energy from chaos shaped into duration. But is a miracle good or evil?"

Orne took a shuddering breath. "I've always heard that miracles are good, but they really don't have to be good or evil. Good and evil relate to motives. Miracles just are."

"Men have motives," Mahmud said.

"Men can be good or evil by any definitions they want," Orne said. "Where's the miracle in that?"

Mahmud stared down his nose at Orne. "Are you good or evil?"

Orne returned the stare. Winning through this test, his ordeal had taken on a profound meaning for him. He accepted now that this Mahmud was real. What was the prophet trying to make him say?

"How can I be good or evil to myself?" Orne asked.

"Is that your answer?"

Orne felt danger in the question, said: "You're trying to get me to say that men create gods to enforce their definitions of good and evil!"

"Oh? Is that the source of godliness? Come now, my friend. I know your mind; you have the answer in it."

Am I good or evil? Orne asked himself. He forced his attention onto the question, but it was like wading upstream in a swift river. His thoughts twisted and turned, showed a tendency to scatter. He said:

"I'm . . . if I'm one with all the universe, then I am God. I am creation. I am the miracle. How can that be good or evil?"

"What is it about creation?" Mahmud demanded. "Answer me that! Stop evading!"

Orne swallowed, recalled the nightmare sequence of this test. *Creation?* And he wondered if the great psi machine amplified the energy humans called religion.

He thought: *Bakrish said I could bring the dead to life here. Religion's supposed to have a monopoly on that. But how do I separate psi from religion from creation? The original Mahmud's been dead for centuries. If I have recreated him, how do his questions relate to me?*

And there was always the possibility this whole thing was some form of hallucination despite the peculiar sense of reality of it.

"You know the answer," Mahmud insisted. Pressed to his limits, Orne said: "By definition, a creation may act independently of its creator. You are independent of me even though you partake of me. I have cast you loose, given you your freedom. How can I judge you, then? You cannot be good or evil except in your own eyes. Nor can I!" Exultantly, he demanded: "Am I good or evil, Mahmud?"

"Though sayest it for thyself and, thereby, are reborn an innocent," Mahmud said. "Thou hast learned thy lesson and I bless thee for it."

The robed figure bent, lifted the dead child. There was an odd tenderness in Mahmud's motions. He turned away, marched back into the writhing green wall. Silence blanketed the room. The dancing purple lines became almost static, moved in viscous torpor.

Orne felt his body bathed in perspiration. His head ached. His arm throbbed where Maddie had slashed it. His breath came in gasping sobs, as though he had been running.

A bronze clangour echoed behind him. The green wall returned to its featureless gray. Footsteps slapped the floor. Hands worked at the bowl on Orne's head, lifted it gently. The straps that had confined him fell away.

Bakrish came around to stand in front of Orne. "You said it was an ordeal," Orne panted. "And I warned you about hate," Bakrish said. "But you are alive and in possession of your soul."

"How do you know if I still have my soul?" "One knows by the absence," Bakrish murmured. He glanced at Orne's wounded arm. "We must get that bandaged. It's night now and time for the next step."

"Night?" Orne peered up at the slitted windows in the dome. They gave him a view of darkness punctured by stars. He looked around the giant room, realized the shadowless exciter-light of glowglobes had replaced the daylight. He said: "Time goes quickly here."

"For some it does," Bakrish sighed. "Not for others." He motioned for Orne to get up. "Come along."

"Let me rest a moment. I'm worn out."

"We'll give you an energy pill when we bandage your arm. Hurry along now!"

"What's the rush? What am I supposed to do now?"

"It is apparent that you understand the two faces of a miracle," Bakrish said. "I observe that you have a personal mystique, an ethic in the service of life, but there is much more to your ordeal and the time is short."

"What's next?" Orne asked. "You must walk through the shadow of dogma and ceremony. It is written that motive is the

father of ethics and caution is the brother of fear. . . . Bakrish paused . . . and fear is the daughter of pain."

*Silence is the guardian of wisdom, but loud jesting and levity lead a man into his own ignorance. Where there is ignorance there is no understanding of God.*

—SAYINGS OF THE ABBODS

**H**e shows a nice restraint," the Abbod said. "I observe that in him: a nice restraint. He doesn't play with his powers."

The Abbod sat on a low stool in front of his fireplace, Macrithy standing behind him with the latest report on Orne. In spite of the hopeful words, there was sadness in the Abbod's voice.

Macrithy heard the tone, said: "I, too, observe that he did not call his woman to his side or otherwise experiment with the great Machine. Tell me, Reverend Abbod, why is it you do not sound happy about this observation?" "Orne will reflect upon this himself, given time. He will see that he does not need the machine to do what he wills. What then, dear friend?"

"You have no doubts that he is the god you called up?"

"No doubts at all. And when he discovers his enormous powers . . ."

"He will come seeking you, Reverend Abbod." "There will be no stopping him, of course. I don't even want it tried. There exists only one challenge I pray he will face."

"We stopped the Speaking Stone," Macrithy ventured.

"Did we? Or did it turn away in amusement, seeing another purpose in existence?"

Macrithy put his hands to his face. "Reverend Abbod, when will we stop these terrible explora-

tions into regions where we have no right to go?"

"No right?"

"When will we stop?" Macrithy lowered his hands, revealing tearstains on his round cheeks.

"We will never stop short of our total extinction," the Abbod said.

"Why? Why?"

"Because we began this way, dear friend. This has begun, it had a beginning. That is the other meaning of discovery. It means to open up into view that which has always been, that which is without beginning and without end. We delude ourselves, you see? We cut a segment out of forever and say, 'See! Here is where it started and here is where it ends!' But that is only our limited viewpoint speaking."

*Order implies law. By this, we indicate the form which helps our understanding of order, enabling us to predict and otherwise deal with order. To go on to say, however, that law requires intent, this is another issue. It does not at all follow from the existence of law. In fact, awareness of eternity opens quite a contrary view. Intent requires beginning: first, the intent and then the law. The essence of eternity is no beginning, no end. Without beginning, no intent, no eternal motive. Without end, no ultimate goal, no judgment. From these observations, we postulate that sin and guilt, products of intent, are not fixed derivatives of eternity. At the very least, such concepts as sin-guilt-judgement require beginnings, thus occur as segments of eternity. Such concepts are ways of dealing with finite law and, only incidentally with eternal matters. It is thus we understand how limited and limiting are our projections onto Godhead.*

—ABBOD HALMYRACH, *Challenge of Eternity*

**T**he night air carried a chill nip, making Orne thankful for the thickness of his toga. Bakrish had led him to a large park area enclosed within the religious warren. Birds cooed from trees in the deeper shadows. The place smelled of new-mown grass. There were no artificial lights in the immediate area, but Bakrish followed a rough path as though he could see it and Orne followed the dim outline of the priest's robe.

Ahead of them, a hill stood outlined against stars. Up the hill marched a snaketrack of moving lights.

Orne's injured arm still ached, but an energy tablet had walled off his weariness.

Bakrish spoke over his shoulder: "The lights are carried by students and each is accompanied by a priest. Each student has a two-metre pole with a lighted box atop it. The box has four translucent sides, each of a different colour, as you can see—red, blue, yellow and green."

Orne watched the lights flickering like phosphorescent insects on the dark hill. "What's the reason for all this?"

"They demonstrate piety."

"Why the four colors?"

"Ahhh, red for the blood you dedicate, blue for truth, yellow for the richness of religious experience, and green for the growth of life."

How does marching up a mountain show piety?

"Because they do it!"

Bakrish picked up the pace, deserted the path to cross a stretch of lawn. Orne stumbled, hurried to catch up. He wondered again why he allowed himself to follow this ordeal. Because it might lead him to the Abbod? Because Atson had ordered him to carry out this assignment? Because of his oath to the I-A? None of these reasons seemed adequate. He felt trapped on a narrow track which he might leave as easily as Bakrish had left the pathway behind them.

The priest stopped at a narrow open gate through a stone wall and Orne grew aware that a line of silent people was passing through the gateway. Hands reached out from the line to take long poles from a rack beside the gateway. Lights bloomed into existence beyond the wall. He smelled human perspiration, heard the shuffling of feet, the swish of robes. An occasional cough sounded, but there was no conversation.

Bakrish took a pole from the rack, twisted the base. Light glowed from a box at the top of the pole. The box was turned red side toward the procession through the gate. It cast a ruddy glow on the people—student and priest, student and priest, eyes downcast, expressions sober and intense.

"Here," Bakrish thrust the pole into Orne's hands.

It felt oily smooth to Orne. He wanted to ask what he was supposed to do with it besides carry it . . . if anything, but the silence of the procession daunted him. He felt silly holding the thing.

Continued on page 27



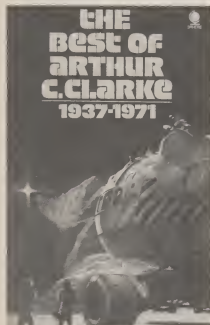


# the Artist in Science Fiction

by LYNNE WHAITES

**Foss, Christopher. Born: 19 March 1946. Studied: Cambridge University, 1964-66. Sf artist; work includes sf paperback covers for Isaac Asimov's Foundation Trilogy (Panther edition, September 1973), E.E.'Doc' Smith's Lensman series (Panther edition, June 1972 - August 1973), John Brunner's The Dramaturges of Yan (New English Library edition, due out April 1974).**

Chris Foss is amongst the most prolific of the artists at present working in the sphere of science fiction with hundreds of covers to his credit. A close attention to detail characterises all his work as



does the recurrent theme of transportation in space and it is often difficult to distinguish the real from the imaginary in his paintings. This is partially because his illustrations depict subjects and situations that are not too far removed from actuality. Foss himself affirms:

"I paint science fact not science fiction. My work shows a time that is only one step above life today. I take things happening today and then add on about 150 years."

Foss' interest has always been in the technical side of art, and this is very much emphasised in his work. He originally wanted to study architecture, went to Cambridge to do so but left after two years to follow a more flexible art career. Whilst at college he worked for a time on an adult strip cartoon. The idea was eventually dropped but the cartoon – in the style of Barbarella – was the beginning of Foss' 'sf' work.

Three years ago, after working for a period as a draughtsman designing sculptures, Foss began his series of cover art.

The first commercial interest in his sf work followed the publication of one of his illustrations in a 1970 edition of *Nova*. This was an intricate line drawing of a futuristic city. Cover work quickly followed and in Summer 1970 he completed his first sf cover for the Panther edition of Arthur C. Clarke's *The Coming of the Space Age*.

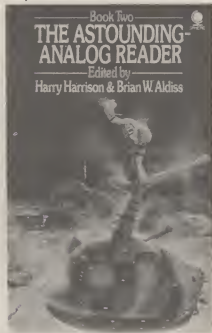
Foss now concentrates mainly on sf cover art although he does undertake a number of war and



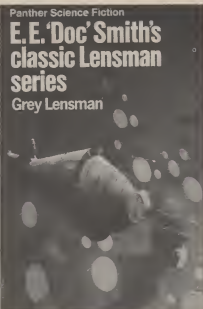
sea theme illustrations for book jackets and occasional magazine work. These, like his sf covers, generally reflect his interest in the mechanical and technical.

Because accuracy and detailed mechanical observations are such an important part of his work, Foss spends a great deal of time studying the transport and machinery of the twentieth century and uses this knowledge when creating his idea of transport of the future:

"I pick up basic principles – how things work – and quite often they come back to me when I



**Panther Science Fiction**  
**asimov**  
Foundation



need them for a cover. Things I see or talk about are often useful later. Working on science fiction you find that mechanical principles similar to those of today are going to be used in the future."

The success of this background work can be seen in such covers as the 1973 Sphere editions of *The Astounding-Analog Reader*, *Book Two* and *The Best of Arthur C. Clarke 1937-1971* and the Panther 1973 edition of *The Current of Space* by Isaac Asimov. These all have the sense of reality for which Foss strives.

"The most important thing in any painting is whether or not the artist has managed to convey the feel of the subject. I like to get a 'you are there' atmosphere in my work – the art comes second. You have got to have an idea and the technique to carry it out."

Foss enjoys the freedom he is allowed when creating his cover designs although he finds this is limited slightly by the demands of the publisher:

"One man I work for insists that any picture I bring him be so clear that if I hold it at the other side of the room he can still make out every detail. I can see his point because you are really painting a poster advertising a book."

To achieve the clear lines of his work without losing any atmosphere he uses acrylic gouache colour. He tries to keep to one coat but sometimes finds it necessary to use a number of layers to achieve the right effect.

At the moment Foss is completing a book of his work commissioned by Archon Press. This takes his sf art one step further and is a collection of paintings illustrating his concept of tomorrow's world. The book, which has already created much interest abroad, is due to be published at the end of this year.

Not surprisingly the artists he admires are those who show skill

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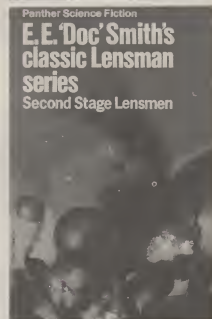
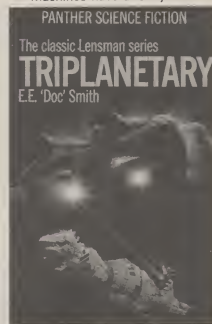


in their work and still have that 'something extra' which adds flair.

"Turner has always been one of my favourite artists. He gets the effect over in his work. I also like the Dutch masters of the 14th century because they show great observation in their paintings."

The main influences on Foss' work, however, are placed firmly in the mechanics of the 20th century. From his studies he has developed strong ideas about the role of machinery in the future:

"Machines have already taken



over – it seems inevitable that we will experience an energy crunch soon. One of these days I'd like to build some form of transport which uses minimal energy."

His current plan is to buy a scrap yard near his home in North Cambridge. It is full of old pieces of machinery and Foss explained:

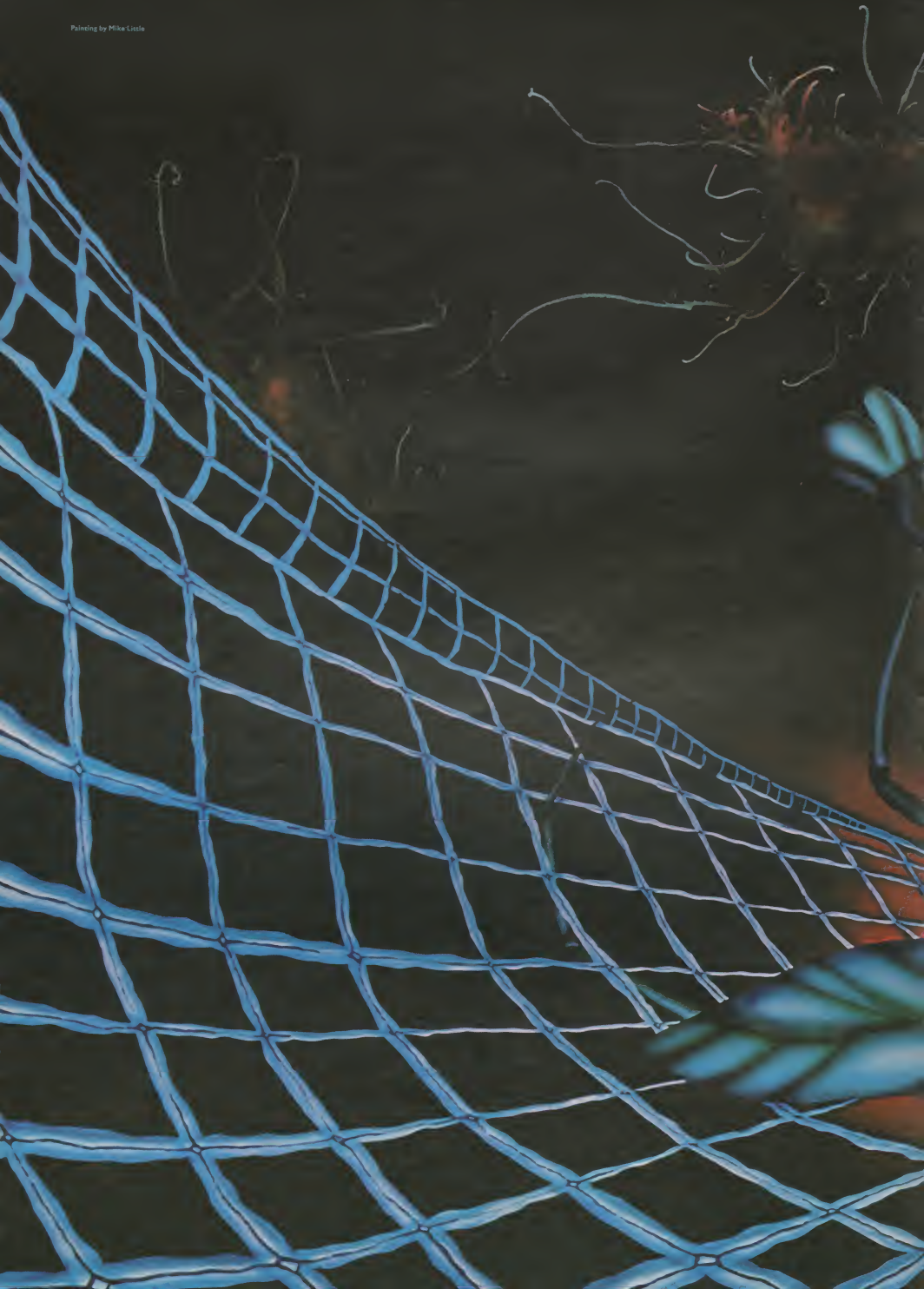
"I don't know what I would do with it but you get some lovely stuff in a scrapyard. It might even be useful for my work – give me some more ideas."

**Panther Science Fiction**  
**asimov**  
Second Foundation















# Blue theme & fugue

Continued from page 4

there confirmed the deductions made by the Trathonians from the photophonic messages received from the first, crewless probes: the bi-peds were fully mobile and had a height when erect of 10 ros<sup>5</sup>. Decomposition of their cellular structure recorded by the pod's radio-controlled assessor seemed to be rapid by Trathonian standards and suggested a useful life of 68 orbres plus or minus 10.

**I**t appears (Zed logged) that the primitive organs of communication receive highly crude colour systems as stimulants and the bi-peds respond by beating the extremities of the upper limbs together to create a pretty but superficial flood of discordant sparks. Query: what purpose has this ritual?

The leaders of this ceremony stand or recline on a central platform. The colour stimulants are administered by mechanical means through appliances manipulated by the leaders and obviously designed to augment natural powers inadequate for the purpose.

These appliances are most frequently operated by an orifice in the head of the bi-peds similar to those recognised in the fossil ichthyosaurs of the dead seas of Trathonian Era 10<sup>-8</sup>.

On one occasion one of the bi-ped leaders endeavoured to make colour by the use of the orifice unaided. The result was a reproduction much inferior to that achieved by mechanical means. Query: is life form decadent, one whose natural powers are diminishing and must now resort to mechanical aids?

The optical organs do not appear to be highly developed and, almost certainly, cannot respond to the sound spectrum as ours do.

The visitor from Trathon Ten circled the hall slowly in his protective pod, working hard to record everything that he saw and heard. Strict training prevented him from drawing any firm conclusions from these early observations. The preliminary probes sent from his world over the last 3,600 periods had suggested a diversity of activities on this planet.

From the lack of interest the close-packed, pulsating bi-peds showed in him or in the voyage capsule which had lodged securely behind the podium in the centre of their meeting place, Zed concluded that neither was detectable by their rather blunt senses.

As an experiment, he powered the sense-stimulator and directed it at one of the colour-manufacturing acolytes on the podium. If Zed or any part of the expedition was detectable, the instrument would heighten the alien's senses sufficiently to give a chance of his glimpsing the visitor.

He gave the machine all the power he dared. The jerking column of sound which was his target faltered but quickly recovered. The resistance dial hummed angrily. Zed cut the current in disgust.

There was now no point in delaying further exploration. Following Procedure Six rigidly, he checked the anti-g potential of his batteries. He found that they would last a further deca-period before they needed recharging. Everything here had been recorded meticulously. With a final listen round he reduced densities to their limit and filtered through the ringing barrier of the wall.

A thunderstorm of light set his auditory sense tingling with pain. He let out a golden screech and dimmed the inrush of colours to a point where he could just hear the faint warbling of the nearer stars and the pulsing beams of the planet's only satellite.

He knew that the exploration shot had been timed to land him on the sector of the planet in night phase. If this was the kind of sound diffused light inflicted, what would happen when this side of the alien world turned toward its star and day?

**T**rathonians (Zed recorded in his log) certainly could not colonise here without considerable modification or protection techniques. Disturbing light intensities would bombard our acute hearing to an unbearable degree. However, the manufacture of every nuance of colour in which the indigenous life indulges would be a desirable field for research.

The most serious difficulty will come in making ourselves perceptible to and establishing communication with the natives. Their crude senses are deafened by a continual over-rich diet of colour which exists in a degree unknown on Trathon Ten and blinded by an intensity of sound which is trapped in the dense envelope the planet drags with it through space. What hope could these bi-peds have of ever experiencing our subtle changes of inter-thought or ultra-signal aesthetics? . . .

Back at the Concert Hall, in a below-stage dressing room, Ferry Saint, clarinettist and leader of the Saints Modern Jazz Quintet, scowled at the rest of the group.

"How should I know what happened?" he muttered angrily. "I felt fine before the show. I didn't take a thing. We were going good weren't we?" He stared moodily at his clarinet as though it was to blame for his present misfortune.

His companions nodded agreement but no one said anything and with a gesture of disbelief Ferry went on: "Then we went into that encore of the Blue Theme and when I hit the C Sharp it was like something hit me and went on through without stopping. I can't explain it. . . . Then just for a moment I saw what I was playing. Can you understand how mad that is? I saw the sound, boys. And it was blue. That was the hell of it. Just for a second I saw thick, rich indigo coming right out of the end of that horn."



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**D. TILLSTONE**  
96 Durning Rd., Liverpool L7 5NH

To accept for a moment a definition of science fiction as the study of things that haven't happened yet but may happen at any moment is to realise that the science fiction film carries a basic contradiction within itself. A space wheel, for example, may not be orbiting the Earth right now, but *2001* has shown us the thing in full flight, and with far greater clarity and conviction than the NASA transmissions have been able to achieve. The wheel has *already* been filmed; after Kubrick, you might say, there seems little point in spending a fortune on the genuine article. Want to know what it's like in space? The whole experience is made safe and easy for us by *2001*. Want to glimpse the ferocity of nuclear warfare? It's all there in *The War Game*, except that we survive more or less intact. Want to see the effects of ecological breakdown and overpopulation? In *No Blade of Grass* and *Soylent Green* tomorrow has become yesterday, and we are still serenely occupying our respective todays, floating in a bubble of horrific 'now' like the girl in the glass phone-booth in Hitchcock's *The Birds*. The cinema creates its futures out of images filmed many months ago, which indeed increasingly show their age, like *Forbidden Planet* or *Things to Come*, and become history without ever having been fact. Although science fiction tries to cheat time by taking us ahead, it is subject to the same laws as the rest of us

and evaluated (numerous antecedents include *Seven Days in May* and *THX1138*), and of course the whole setting of Delos itself, the holiday resort in which at least three kinds of dream have become true. There's Romanworld, an endless round of orgiastic feasting and merriment among graceful damsels and cool fountains. There's Medievalworld, where banquets and wenching give way only occasionally to the thrill of tournament or torture chamber. And there's Westworld, where the scrubby little studio street, the tinkling saloon and the rumbling stagecoach provide a background so familiar that the Wild Bunch could bust the bank at any moment.

It's as real as anything else," one idle tourist remarks to the other, and this is the heart of Michael Crichton's film. In Delos, everyone who isn't a tourist is a robot, which means that slave girls, Black Knights, or gunmen are all programmed to satisfy the customer and fall at his feet in appropriate postures of impotence whenever he raises a fist. The black-suited gunslinger of Westworld spouts synthetic blood from the wounds inflicted by his inept opponent just like the dying men in Peckinpah movies; dragged off to a workshop surgery overnight for some brisk tinkering with screwdriver and soldering-iron, his body



The tourist attraction in *West World* is a fashionable holiday resort, where the dummies are amazingly life-like, but electronic surgery is regularly needed to keep them functioning. Courtesy MGM

and shows us only what we know already, disguised and decorated maybe, but alien only in the sense that no two minds think exactly the same way.

So it is that *Westworld* is one of the happiest things to have happened to sf in a long time, precisely because it recognises that we are shaped by the myths created in a celluloid past. Hardly an image in its early scenes is not derived from the recurring visions of film and television – the eager interviewer from the washing-powder commercials, the expectant tourists being herded through pristine decor like characters in a Tati film, the massed ranks of screens and dials through which every action is observed

One of the surprising faces of Yul Brynner during his performance as an almost indestructible robot in the film *West World*. Courtesy MGM



# WESTWORLD

IN THE CINEMA

Reviews by Philip Strick



is all ready to spout again the next day. He is both expendable and invulnerable, a magnificent metaphor that has marched through the pages of sf since Frankenstein first constructed him, Asimov gave him three laws, and Kuttner gave him a sense of humour. He is, above all, humanoid, constructed in his makers' image like any other offspring, and as his circuits become increasingly sophisticated he gradually achieves, like any other offspring, a measure of independence. What more logical, then, both morally and in terms of narrative, than that the robot should at last fight back, demonstrating his technical superiority over the feeble and inaccurate creatures who dreamed him up? As with HAL in 2001, perfection may be the cause of revolt but there's a hint of malice there too, a glinting revenge for the indignities too often endured in the past. It's a turnabout that Philip K Dick has worried over for years in a torrent of



Jerry Cornelius (Jon Finch) fights his way to the bedroom of his sister Catherine (Sarah Douglas) only to find she has been heavily drugged by their brother Frank. Film Final Programme. Courtesy Anglo-EMI

superb novels in which biological and mechanical 'reality' become indistinguishable, in which our surroundings are crumbling fakes, our acquaintances mere facsimiles. Which is the more 'real': a collapsing extra in *The Wild Bunch*, red streamers lacing the air around him, or an actor imitating a humanoid in *Westworld*, his 'death' as obscene as it is meaningless?

The film sets up so many resonances of this kind that it could easily have been a masterpiece. Hiding within it is an allegory about the myths by which we destroy ourselves, about the ease with which we dehumanise the society in which we live, about the evolution of man into a hyper-efficient fighting machine, about the risks involved in externalising our desires. That Crichton was aware of these implications is evident from his quasi-satirical slow-motion gun-fights and especially from the bar-room brawl, in which *North to Alaska* (and a host of other John Wayne movies) and *Clockwork Orange* meet in hilarious collision. Every furniture-smashing cliché is there – the flying bottles, the collapsing bannisters, the bodies thrown through windows, dropped on tables, slid along the counter, piled on the floor. Only the tourists, however, suffer from hangovers; the robots, like animated furniture, can be polished up like new. By the end of the film they are all set to inherit the earth, leaving behind them

the fragments of human caprice in a welter of bullet-holes, torn togas, and fallen armour.

Get the message, in what seems to be the unavoidable tradition of sf cinema, is constantly muffled, mumbled and mismanaged in *Westworld*. Crichton has directed his own script, and no-one has apparently intervened with advice about tearing out pages here and there. The film has a funeral pace, a tendency never to use one reaction shot where three will ram the point home, and a curiously haphazard style of editing that holds up the action just when it should be going full belt. The character played by Richard Benjamin is insipidly repellent, while the motivations of his companion are a complete mystery except in the context of James Brolin's popularity in an American television series. That much of the lighting in the film is ugly to watch is consistent with the low-budget charades that have inspired the tourist resort in the first place, but more could surely have been done with the spectacular qualities of the Roman and Medieval reconstructions, used on the whole like nothing more than backgrounds to a Dick Emery sketch. The final scenes of incongruity, an anachronistic mixture of costumes filmed in the extraordinary exotica of the Harold Lloyd estate, have genuine touches of surrealism (as when a flaming human torch staggers between two enthroned and motionless medieval figures), but too often Crichton doesn't go far enough when we red-blooded fantasists are crying out for more. Sf fans, however, will not be inclined to complain too loudly; this is one of cinema's all-too-infrequent contributions to the genre that can claim a sense of fun as well as of imagination.

For comparison, one only has to cast a glance at *The Legend of Hell House*, which attracts the sf enthusiast's immediate attention for having been written by Richard Matheson, an erratic but often memorable writer (*I Am Legend*, *The Shrinking Man*), whose work for the cinema

In the eerie corridors of the Solaris space station, unexplained figures loom and vanish, much to the surprise of the visitor (Yuri Jarvet). Courtesy UPS



Jerry Cornelius (Jon Finch) discusses with his Guru (Hugh Griffith) the steps that must be taken if the world is to receive a new Messiah. Courtesy Anglo-EMI

includes *Duel* and a fair number of Roger Corman's Poe scripts. If you don't take to the book much, you'll probably loathe the film, which uses so many distorting close-ups in the first five minutes that you begin to wonder if the projectionist is still sober. It's the account of a visit to a haunted house by a small group of specialists seeking to prove the existence of life after death to the satisfaction of an ancient millionaire. As in the book, we never learn whether the survivors report back to him, although they do manage to trace the trouble as far as a defunct Michael Gough, looking as vulpine as ever. Apart from one or two moments of obvious *frisson*, as when the visitors are attacked by the dining table, or when Pamela Franklin is assaulted by a cat, or when Gayle Hunnicut, in her remarkable nose, demonstrates advanced nymphomania, the film appears singularly pointless since it's quite obvious that the supernatural phenomena are caused by the special effects man (whose device for opening and slamming doors can be clearly glimpsed at one point), and that Clive Revill is too unsympathetic a character to be granted survival. Black Box anthropologists will be delighted, however, with the gigantic example featured here, while Roddy McDowell's performance is beautifully calculated – very much in tune with Matheson's characteristic hysteria.

In a scene from *Solaris*, Kris (Donatas Banionis) arrives for the first time on the satellite circling the mysterious planet Solaris, only to find the place almost deserted except for half-glimpsed human figures. Courtesy UPS



Still going the rounds, to the extent that Moscow permits (it has proved almost impossible to get copies of the film out of Russia despite its runaway success) is that brilliant sf film *Solaris*. Although you may take my vested interest in it into account, I beg you not to miss the chance of seeing Tarkovsky's work, one of the most fascinating experiences the cinema has to offer. Like *Westworld*, it's concerned with reality and the insidious influences of the past. And like the best science fiction, it stays with you for a long, long time.

# NEWS

## by PENNY GRANT

**MIKE MOORCOCK'S** first venture into music, a single comprising two straight rock and roll numbers written by himself, is due out shortly. Moorcock, it appears, has more than just a talent for writing; he sings lead vocal and plays 12-string guitar on the disc. He is also working with *Hawkwind* guitarist Dave Brock on an album to be released by Liberty this spring. The album, a fantasy on the lines of a rock opera, contains songs based on his books. These are connected in narrative sequence and have as their central character the Eternal Champion, who is reincarnated in a number of roles under different names.

**BRITISH ARTIST** Andrew Stephenson has been commissioned by Harper & Rowe of New York to illustrate Christopher Priest's new novel, *The Inverted World*, which will be published in the Spring of this year. Stephenson's interest in science fiction started at university. Later he met up with organised fandom via the BSFA (British Science Fiction Association), the Globe meetings (see our last issue) and the



Science Fiction Foundation. His first illustrations appear in the fanzines *Cynic*, *Macrocosm*, *Zimri* and *Vector*, but his professional breakthrough came with his illustrations for *Speculation* of Larry Niven's Guest of Honour Speech at the Easter Convention 72. Niven liked them so much that he sold them with his speech as a package to *Analog*. Stephenson's techniques are varied, adapting themselves to the requirements of the medium. They range from simple line drawings, through half-tone and scraper board, to the complex blending of techniques exemplified in the *Analog* illustrations.

**PIERIA** is a workshop which has recently been set up in the Oxford/Thames Valley area for amateur writers of science fiction.



Mike Moorcock with Dave Brock

At each session writers bring along original manuscripts for constructive criticism by their peers. Each story is read, discussed and the author is then given time to reply to what has been said. Pieria is modelled on the Milford conferences initiated in England by James and Judy Blish, and developed from similar meetings held by the Oxford University Science Fiction Group. To enable plenty of time to be spent on each story, Pieria's workshops are spread over a weekend, the aim being to give one and a half hour's attention to each story. Anyone wanting further details about the workshop should contact Robert Holdstock, 14 Coxhill Gardens, River, Dover.

**FANZINES** There are many, many fanzines (amateur of magazines). Some are joint efforts but most are written, produced and distributed by just one person working heroically from a backroom with only an antiquated duplicating machine and limitless energy. For this reason, fanzines usually appear at irregular intervals and are of varying standards, but they are useful for anyone who wants to get in touch with other sf readers. We are listing a few that have been published recently: *Speculation* edited by Pete Weston, 72 Beeches Drive, Erdington, Birmingham 24. *Zimri* edited by Lisa Conesa, 54 Manley Road, Whalley Range, Manchester M16 9HP. *Checkpoint* edited by Peter

*Fanzine editors – would you like a mention in SFM? If so, let us have copies of your latest issue and we'll try to fit you in.*

Roberts, 6 Westbourne Park Villas, London W2.

*The Alien Critic* edited by Richard E Geis, PO Box 11408, Portland, Oregon 97211, USA.

*Locus* edited by Dena and Charlie Brown, PO Box 3938, San Francisco, California 94119, USA. It's distributed in England by Pete Weston of *Speculation*.

**DENT** is starting a science fiction list. Their first two books, due out in April, are: *The Sheep Look Up*, John Brunner's major new novel, and *Halcyn Drift* by Brian Stableford.

### Paperbacks

*Out of Space and Time* (Volume 2) edited by Clark Ashton-Smith. Published by Panther. A collection of short stories originally published in *Weird Tales* in the 1930s.

*The Jewel in the Skull* by Michael Moorcock. Published by Mayflower.

*Dragonquest* by Anne McCaffrey. Published by Sphere. The second in the series about the planet Pern. The Red Star shoots out tendrils and destroys the land whenever Pern comes into its orbit. It can only be conquered by the great fire-breathing dragons of Pern. The book deals with the political confrontation between the dragonriders and the great landed families.

*The Sun Grows Cold* by Howard Berk. Published by Panther. A first rate and chilling post-Apocalypse story set in America where the pressures due to over-population have become intolerable.

*The New Adam* by Stanley G Weinbaum. Published by Sphere. The book tackles the subject of the successor to man as we know him now. A child is born with an extra lobe on his brain. This gives him powers which seem supernatural to his contemporaries so that, although he is superior to them, he is regarded as an outcast.

Corgi Science Fiction Collectors Library:  
*The City and the Stars* by Arthur C Clarke.  
*Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter J Miller.

*The Big Sun of Mercury* by Isaac Asimov. Published by New English Library. Number three in the Space Ranger Series.

*The Ice Schooner* by Michael Moorcock. Published by Sphere. A book set in the future when the next Ice Age has come and people are travelling in ships on skis and hunting the ice whalers. One man is entrusted with the finest ship in the fleet and is sent to find the legendary city of New York.

*Best Science Fiction Stories from New Worlds No 8*. Edited by Michael Moorcock. Published by Panther.

*Eternal Man* by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier. Published by Mayflower. Highly technological beings have lived on earth before, only to destroy themselves... Maps of the earth existed 10,000 years ago, so accurate that they could only have been drawn with the aid of aircraft...

### BOOKS FEBRUARY/MARCH Hardbacks

*Fiction: The Great Years* edited by Carol & Frederick Pohl. Published by Gollancz. Science Fiction stories of the 30s, 40s and 50s – brash, vulgar but still valid.

*Casey Agonistes* by Richard McKenna. Published by Gollancz. Introduced by Damon Knight, this is a selection of stories by a writer who is above all interested in people and their reactions to the fantastic situations he describes.

*Race Against Time* by Piers Anthony. Published by Sidgwick & Jackson. A book for children which examines the questions of freedom and reality. The small village of Newton is sleepy and peaceful, but John gradually comes to feel like a prisoner under surveillance.

















Wiltshaw watched for the green light over the door. His tall figure was stiff, his blue eyes narrowed and fixed on the calendar on the wall by the secretary's head. June 2297! He shook his head slowly, almost in wonder, but time didn't mean anything to him. He saw the green light blink and, as he crossed the wide carpet, the door of Commissar Vacslav's office opened by remote control. He entered, knowing what this was all about, and he hoped he could bluff the Commissar again. If they exiled him to Runa, the penal star, he would be finished, and so would twenty years of valuable work.

Vacslav was a short, dark Mongolian, and Wiltshaw wondered how the man had managed to overcome his origins to rise to his present position. For even Vacslav was not immune to Authority, although he commanded this vast Complex. No one was safe, not even the World President himself. Even in this enlightened century there were always purges taking place.

"Sit down, Wiltshaw," Vacslav rapped, and frowned when he was ignored. "I have had more reports that you are still slacking in your work. What is wrong with you? You are getting so close to a breakthrough in your tests! Everything points to it although your reports are so pessimistic. Are you sick?"

"I'm all right!" Wiltshaw had heard the many rumours about what happened to men who reported sick. This was an experimental Base. "I've got one last major problem to solve," he said. "I can't do it to order. But with its solution I shall be able to hand you the complete formula for Time travel. That's what you want, isn't it?"

"It's what you've kept us waiting for!" Vacslav leaned forward in his seat, his heavy figure stiff with hope. His dark eyes watched Wiltshaw's lean face with unblinking gaze. "I know you are a good man, but there have been these reports about the way you are evading the final issues of your project."

"Tallent has been making those reports, hasn't he?" Wiltshaw demanded.

"I have informed the President that you will prove those reports wrong by handing Time travel to us on the completion of this present series of tests!" Vacslav tightened his lips. "Don't fail me, Wiltshaw, because if you do I shan't be able to save your life."

"I'm doing my best, I assure you," Wiltshaw retorted, smiling thinly. "If I could get some peace to work out this last problem then I would succeed. But the atmosphere in this place is well nigh intolerable. I'm treated like a prisoner instead of a top scientist."

"We are giving you as much freedom as the situation permits. Just remember that you could get a Red Card for your services to the State if you do succeed in this project. Go back to your office and think deeply about your future. You know what awaits failure, don't you?"

Wiltshaw nodded slowly and turned to depart. Vacslav pressed a button and the door slid open. Wiltshaw did not look round, and hurried back to his department. He paused in the doorway to his office. Tallent, his assistant, was seated at the desk as if he owned it, and there was a wide grin of triumph on the man's thin face. His brown eyes glistened with pleasure.

"I think I've got a positive result on the last test," Tallent called excitedly.

Wiltshaw glanced briefly at the microphone suspended from the ceiling. He knew that every word spoken in this vast warren of offices and testing chambers was recorded in the Security HQ.

"I'll check with you," he said slowly.

"Don't get excited until we're certain." He kept his face straight. The closed circuit video screens would have his face in close-up. If Vacslav suspected they were so near to success everyone would be forced to work overtime.

But Wiltshaw had already solved the problem; despite his denials to Authority. The final solution had come to him in his sleep like a visitation from the Lord. But it was for him alone! He had decided that years ago. They had killed his father twenty years before, and his mother had been exiled to Runa, where life expectancy in the chemical mines was around six months. Wiltshaw could not forget, and when he did make that first trip into Time he had no intention of returning, ever. Then Commissar Vacslav could do what he liked with his beloved World Communism.

Wiltshaw quickly ran through the test Tallent had been conducting. He knew the result would be negative before he started because he always sabotaged Tallent's tests to prevent him discovering the final solution. Tallent might

look over the Craft."

He went along the corridor to the test chamber, and his heart pounded with pride and love when he stood looking at the Craft, nestling on its special base in the centre of the huge testing chamber. It was a large, transparent sphere, glinting now in the subdued lighting, and it was the most sophisticated transporter in the world. He had built it! He glanced up at the Engineer finishing his work on the sliding roof above the Craft, then nodded to himself. All preparations were nearly finished. He glanced around and called to an electrician, a Brown Card whose status was one short step above that of the Stateless Slave, and the man came across wordlessly.

"I want generators set up around the Craft to form a force field during the first test," Wiltshaw said. "I'll need a big electron flow under the Craft as it hovers."

"That could be dangerous," the man retorted.

"If you can't do it then I'll see Vacslav and get someone who can!"

"I didn't say I couldn't do it," the man retorted quickly.

Wiltshaw crossed to the Craft and climbed inside. He closed the transparent hatch, a grin on his face. He had them all fooled. He didn't need a sliding roof. That had been just one excuse to delay

them until he was ready. He didn't need a force field around the Craft, which would not hover before taking off through Time.

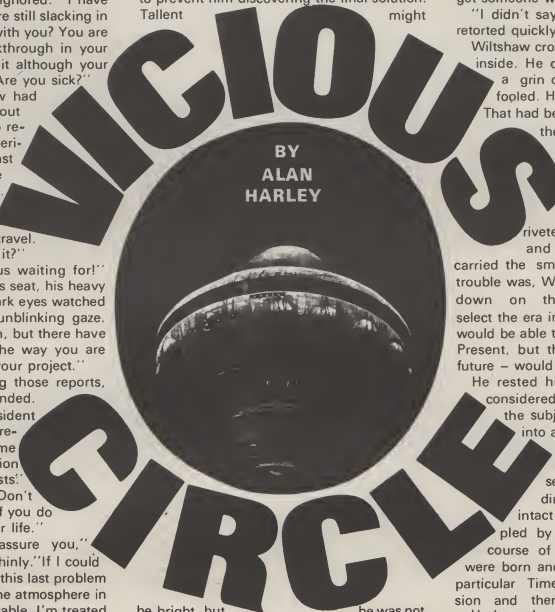
There was a padded couch riveted to the floor of the sphere, and beside it a long metal arm carried the small control panel. The only trouble was, Wiltshaw reflected as he sat down on the couch, he could not select the era in Time he wished to visit. He would be able to transport himself out of the Present, but the Time direction – past or future – would have to be left to Fate.

He rested his head in his hands as he considered. According to his study of the subject, Time was phased, jointed into aeons, which broke away from the string of Time in predetermined lengths to remain on separate planes in different dimensions. These aeons were intact as fragments of Time, peopled by those who lived during the course of unfolding, and those people were born and reborn eternally as their particular Time phase reached its conclusion and then recommenced the cycle.

He knew he needed to get away from the Present before the next Time break occurred, for if he was caught up in this particular span he would be eternally trapped on the same plane with everything he hated, and that would mean spending twenty years in each future cycle perfecting a Time craft which would take him back every time to exactly where he had started in the beginning.

His father had begun this search for the means to travel into and through Time – his father, who had been killed on the very day his only son reached the impressionable age of fourteen years. Wiltshaw could never forget his fourteenth birthday! It had started wonderfully well, until the news came that his father had fallen in the abortive rebellion against Communist World Order. Ever since that fateful day Wiltshaw had been planning his own escape, and now the time was at hand.

Before Wiltshaw got out of the craft he removed a tiny impulse cell from an ignition circuit and pocketed it. Then he left the Craft and, as he studied the blueprints on the



be bright, but he was not clever enough to see the tests would never succeed. Two negatives would never produce a positive reaction, and Wiltshaw had replaced the positive reactor with a second negative. The fault could easily be discovered, but Wiltshaw never permitted Tallent the time to check their equipment.

"Hard luck!" he said shortly. "Negation! Try Plan Two and increase the input. If that doesn't work you'd better revise the calculations in the Basic Phase. I'll look in and help you later."

"But I don't understand this!" Tallent said angrily.

"Of course you don't!" Wiltshaw retorted grimly. "You're not as clever as you think."

"I don't mean in that way. I'm thinking of this set-up. Everything points to success! But it never goes right. I think it is about time we rechecked circuits and impellers. We must have got a couple of wires crossed somewhere."

"You're not to strip down the equipment," Wiltshaw snapped. "There's no time for that. Just do as I tell you! I'm going to

boards, Commissar Vacslav and two guards, followed by a grinning Tallent, entered the testing chamber.

"Stand where you are, Wiltshaw!" Vacslav commanded, and the two guards levelled their weapons. "You are under arrest. Tallent has discovered at last that you have been deliberately sabotaging his tests. I have seen the evidence for myself. You are finished here as a scientist. Take him out, Guards, and hold him ready for an immediate enquiry."

Wiltshaw was led away, and he took with him an image of Tallent's grinning face. He was cold inside, filled with a great fear that he had overstepped the mark too soon. But they must not stop him now! He fought down his panic as he was locked in a cell. He had to keep a clear mind.

An hour later Tallent visited him, protected by an alert guard, and Wiltshaw's former assistant was in high spirits.

"I can overlook the sabotage," Tallent said, "because now you have been exposed. I had my suspicions for a long time. Now I'll have the honour of handling the first full scale test. Without your sabotage, my own tests have proved successful, and I know what I have to do to prove Time travel."

"Good luck," Wiltshaw said heavily, and touched the tiny impulse cell he had removed from the ignition circuit.

"You're a fool," Tallent retorted. "You could have had all the glory. But you've been asking for the death sentence for a long time, and now you've got it coming."

"I've been under sentence of death since the day my father died in the rebellion," Wiltshaw retorted grimly. "But the sentence was suspended while I was of some use to the State."

"Now you won't live to see the success of your invention," Tallent rasped.

"I will see Time conquered," Wiltshaw replied, smiling grimly.

"My first mission will be to travel through the Future to see what lies in store for the Communist Order over the next thousand years!" Pride edged Tallent's tones.

"And if you discover anything that doesn't suit the Order the President will send the necessary men and equipment to change it!" There was bitterness in Wiltshaw's voice, and he was just beginning to understand what he might have done beyond the hopes he had always held.

"Call it judicious reshaping of future events," Tallent insisted cheerfully. "Now I must go. The President himself is coming to witness my first attempt to pass through the Time barrier."

"Goodbye," Wiltshaw said, and there was an enigmatic smile on his lips as Tallent strutted out.

It was mid-afternoon when Wiltshaw was summoned to Commissar Vacslav's office. He was flanked by two guards when the green light flashed and he entered the inner sanctum. Wiltshaw frowned when he saw World President Shenko seated in Vacslav's chair, with the Commissar standing in close attendance.

"You have been sentenced to death by a special sitting of the local People's Court," the President said without preamble. "It has been established that you robbed the State of valuable time by your sabotage."

"I spent twenty years of my life trying to give you Time as a gift," Wiltshaw retorted bitterly. "Now you have it and I am condemned. But it is no more than I expected."

"You are not a sworn Communist," Vacslav put in slowly.

"If you had finished this project satisfactorily you would have had all rights fully restored to you," Shenko condemned. "As it is, you are now under sentence of death. However!" He paused and glanced at

Vacslav. "We have run into trouble with the first full scale test of the Craft. We still need your help, Wiltshaw, and I will make a bargain with you. Complete and perfect the Craft for Time travel and you will get a Red Card and full freedom."

"What has happened?" Wiltshaw demanded.

"Tallent tested the Craft thirty minutes ago," Vacslav said sullenly. "When he applied full power he vanished instantly from the Craft."

Wiltshaw sniggered, and the President glared at him.

"Tallent has gone into Time, obviously," Vacslav went on. "But the Craft is still on its Base so Tallent won't be able to return. That makes the test useless and a failure. We need the operator of the Craft to return with it to report."

"So what do you want me to do?" Wiltshaw gazed steadily into the President's eyes.

"I've already explained," Shenko told him. "Perfect the Craft and win a full pardon for yourself."

Wiltshaw tried to show reluctance, but not for long.

"All right," he accepted slowly and with



some hesitation. "I'll try."

He was conducted to the testing chamber by the two guards, followed closely by the President and Vacslav. They stood watching curiously in their ignorance while Wiltshaw ran through a series of checks. He was filled with elation when he saw the generators for the force field all set up, and he glanced at Vacslav as he checked the control console.

"You were here watching Tallent making his first test I suppose," he commented. "That's right. We all saw him vanish without a trace."

"That was because he didn't use the force field," Wiltshaw was relieved that the elec-

trician who had set it up was no longer on duty. "Now you've lost Tallent for ever!" He's probably a billion years away by now."

"Get on with it," the President ordered impatiently.

Wiltshaw nodded. He took Vacslav to the control panels and pointed out the main switch that activated the force field he had said he needed around the Craft.

"When I wove to you from inside the Craft," Wiltshaw said, "you must push home this switch. Have you got that?"

Vacslav nodded intently and Wiltshaw took a last look around. He connected several circuits and green and red lights flickered. A faint hum came from concealed power units, and the noise slowly picked up a rising crescendo that stabilised at an intolerable level. The President covered his ears with his hands and the two guards lost their alertness under the sonic pressure. But it didn't matter now as Wiltshaw crossed to the Craft. He paused to check that the sliding roof was open, and elation filled him as he entered the Craft and closed the hatch, for now he was beyond their power.

Stretching himself out on the couch, Wiltshaw swung the small control panel over his chest and depressed the top row of buttons on it. Lights flickered, changed colour,

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**He was standing on the threshold of the unknown and he had no idea what would happen.**

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then remained constant. He glanced out of the Craft and saw Vacslav standing by the console, hand on the main switch of the force field. Wiltshaw waved, and closed his eyes as he saw Vacslav's shoulders heave as the man thrust home the switch.

Wiltshaw had expected the blinding flash as the force field was activated, but he opened his eyes quickly, his vision clearing. When he looked towards Vacslav and the President he saw they were gone; the guards as well! He had expected that, for they had been standing in the area of the force field and had disintegrated in the tremendous release of power. They were wiped out as if they had never been, and Wiltshaw sensed that he had evened the score for the past twenty years. His father's death had been avenged.

Now nervousness gripped him. He was trembling inside, but mainly from anticipation. He was standing upon the threshold of the unknown and he had no idea what would happen. His right hand trembled as his forefinger stabbed down at the button that would activate the Craft. He hit the button and closed his eyes, his mind working at terrific speed as he waited that split second of eternity for action.

A nightmare of light and sound erupted and shock waves tore at him. Invisible surges of power pinned him to the couch and blackness swept overwhelmingly into his mind. Some gigantic vortex tugged at his molecular structure. Time seemed to stand still. There was a growing sensation of falling weightlessly down, down into a dark warp...

Then a flashing moment of stark awareness pierced his reeling brain and he made a frightening recollection. The impulse cell which he had removed earlier to sabotage any attempt Tallent might make in his absence! It was still in his pocket. In his eagerness to destroy Vacslav and the President in the force field he had forgotten to replace the cell in the ignition circuit. Its absence had caused Tallent to shoot off into Time without the security of the Craft and denied him the ability to return! The thought



jarely passed through his mind when he blacked out, and then there was nothing.

Wiltshaw found himself lying on his back on a lawn, staring up at a cloudless blue sky. The sun was blazing down. His mind was pleasantly relaxed, but his head was aching slightly. From inside the nearby house a woman's voice was calling his name repea-

tefully. He got up and went into the kitchen for a drink of water, still unable to recollect himself completely.

Then his mother came through from the hall and began to tell him that she had just learned the news of his father's death in the rebellion, and Wiltshaw had the uncanny feeling he had heard it all before.

Inense wafted across Orne's nostrils. A hidden voder began emitting low organ notes, a melody full of rumbling and sonorous passages which came up behind the priest's voice, but never drowned it.

Orne saw a graveman circling the massed audience to the right, priests there waving censers. Blue smoke wafted over the listeners in ghostly curls. A bell tinkled in abrupt cadence as the priest paused. It rang seven times.

Like a man hypnotized, Orne absorbed the whole scene, thinking: *Massed emotions act like a psi force! What is this power?*

The priest at the stupa raised both arms, fists clenched, shouted: "Eternal paradise to all true believers! Eternal damnation to all unbelievers!" His voice lowered: "You, who seek the eternal truth, fall to your knees and beg for enlightenment. Pray for the veil to be lifted from your eyes. Pray for the purity which brings holy understanding. Pray for salvation. Pray for the All-Orne to cast his benediction upon you."

A shuffling whisper of robes came from the students as they sank to their knees around Orne. But Orne remained standing, his whole being caught up in discovery: *Massed emotions produce a psi force!* He felt elevated, cleansed, shining on the brink of a great revelation. He wanted to call out to Bakrish, to shout his discovery.

Angry muttering flowed through the kneeling students, catching Orne's attention only in part. Glares of protest were directed at him. The muttering grew louder.

Precisient awareness roared within Orne. He came out of his reverie to recognize the danger all around him.

At the far corner of the kneeling crowd a student lifted an arm, pointed at Orne. "What is he doing? He's a student! Why isn't he kneeling with the rest of us?"

Orne cast searching glances all around. Where was Bakrish? Someone tugged at Orne's robe, urging him to kneel, but Orne backed off. The trail was right behind him through the thicket.

Someone in the massed students screamed: "Unbeliever!" Orne felt the force of it like a psi net hurled across him, dimming his awareness, blocking reason.

Others began taking up the word in a mindless chant: "Unbeliever! Unbeliever! Unbeliever!"

Orne inched his way backward through the thicket, fear sharp within him. The tension of the crowd was a tangible thing, a fuse that smoked and sizzled its way toward a massive explosion.

The bearded priest glared up at Orne, the dark face contorted in the kaleidoscopic gleams of the students' torches. The amphitheatre suddenly was a nightmare scene to Orne, a demonic place, and he realized he still carried his own torch like a waving beacon. Its light revealed the trail beside him leading off into blackness.

Then the priest at the stupa raised his voice to an insane scream: "Bring me the head of that blasphemist!"

Orne hurled his light like a spear as the students jumped to their feet with a roar. He whirled, fled along the trail hearing the thunder and shouts of pursuit.

As his eyes adjusted to starlight, Orne discerned the trail, a black line on black. He discarded caution, ran all out. A ragged yell lifted into the night from his pursuers. The trail curved to the left and a blotch of deeper blackness hid the trail turn. Woods? Branches whipped his face.

The trail dipped, twisted to the right, then left. He tripped on a root, almost fell. His robe caught on a bush and he lost seconds releasing it. The mob was a roaring, waving pack of lights almost upon him. Orne plunged off the trail downhill to his right and parallel to a line of trees. Bushes snagged his robe. He fumbled with the belt, left the robe behind.

Someone above him shouted: "I hear him! Down there!"

The pursuers came to a plunging stop, held silence for a heartbeat. Orne's crashing flight dominated all other sounds.

"There he goes! Down that way!"

They were after him. He heard them breaking through the brush and trees, the curses and shouts.

He looked frowningly at the calendar on the wall, unable for the moment to recall dates or facts, and he was faintly puzzled. The calendar told him it was his fourteenth birthday – May 3rd, 2274, and he had to fight hard to force down the sneaking suspicion that somehow he was trapped in a vicious circle.

"Here's his robe! I've got his robe!"

"Get his head!" someone screamed. "Their hair's head off him!"

Orne ducked a limb, scrambled and slid down a hill, plunged across the trail and tore his way through a thicket. He felt cold and exposed in only sandals and the light shorts he had worn beneath the robe. Branches clawed at his skin. He heard the mob, a human avalanche on the hill above him – curses, tearing sounds, thumps. Lights waved. Robed figures leaped through the night.

Again, Orne found a trail. It went downhill to his right. He turned onto it, gasping, stumbling. His legs ached. A tight band held his chest. His side ached. The trail plunged into deeper darkness and he lost the trail. He glanced up to see trees against the stars.

The mob raised a confused clamour behind him.

Orne stopped, leaned against a tree to listen.

"Part of you got that way!", someone shouted.

"The rest of you follow me!"

Orne drew in wracking breaths, gasping. Hunted like an animal because he'd momentarily abandoned caution! He recalled Bakrish's words: *Caution is the brother of fear.*

Almost directly above Orne and no more than fifty meters away, someone shouted: "Do you hear him?"

Off to the left, an answering voice yelled: "No!"

Orne pushed himself away from the tree, crept down the hill, working his way cautiously, feeling each step. He heard someone running above him, footsteps thumping away to the right. The sound faded. Confused shouts, then silence and then more shouts came from the middle distance on the hill off to the left. These, too, faded.

Someone cried: "The student's taking each step. Orne melted his way through the darkness beneath the trees. Once, he lay flat to allow five, running figures to pass below him. When they were gone, he slipped down the hill and across another loop in the trail. The sound on his arm throbbled and he realized that he had lost the bandage. The pain reminded him of the itching sensation he had experienced while strapped in Bakrish's chair. It had been like the itching experience when a wound healed—but before the wound.

Orne felt that he had encountered another clue to Amel, but its meaning eluded him.

He fell into a fluid rhythm of flight—under the bushes, avoid leaves, dart through the darkest places where trees blotted out the stars. But the trees thinned out, bushes came further apart. He felt lawn underfoot, realized he had come down to the last slopes leading into the park area. Dim lights glowed from windows to his right. There was a wall. Orne crouched, hugged himself to still his shivering.

Bakrish had said the Abbod Halmryrach was near.

As he thought of the Abbod, Orne felt the vacant gnawing within him ease momentarily, then throbbing stronger. What did that mean, he wondered? Safe . . . but not safe? He experienced a driving desire to find the Abbod, to bring the truth from the recognized leader of all Amel.

Why bother with the lower echelons? Where was Bakrish when I needed him? Is this the way a field agent of the I-A operates?

Orne felt he had been freed from a dream. *Dogmatic delirium! What empty nonsense!*

A wolfish grin came over Orne's face. He thought: *I declare myself a graduate of this ordeal! It's over. I've passed the tests!*

Footsteps on a path sounded to his left.

Orne slid behind a tree, peered around it. Through the thin starlight filtered by scattered trees he saw a priest in white moving along a path which would take him directly in front of the concealing tree. Orne flattened himself against the trunk, waited. Birds whirled and rustled in the branches overhead. The fragrance of night-blooming flowers crossed his nostrils. The footsteps came closer, passed.

Orne slipped from behind the tree. Four running steps on the soft grass beside the trail, one hand out and around the priest's neck—pressure on a nerve. The priest gasped once, relaxed, slumped in Orne's arms.

# THE GOD MAKERS

Continued from page 11

What were they really doing here? And why were they waiting now?

Bakrish took his arm, whispered: "Here's the end of the procession. Fall in behind me! I will follow you. Carry your light high."

Someone in the line said: "Shhhhh!"

Orne picked out a dim figure at the end of the procession, stepped into line. Immediately, warning prescience suppressed his energy. He stumbled, faltered.

Bakrish whispered: "Keep up! Keep up!"

Orne recovered his stride, but still felt the klaxon emptiness in his vitals. His light cast a dull-green reflection off the priest ahead.

A murmurous rhythm began to sound from the procession far ahead, growing louder as it passed down the line, riding over the shuffling and clitter of robes, drowning out the chitter of insects in tall grass beside their path. It was a wordless sound: "Ah-hh-ah-huh! Ah-hh-ah-huh!"

The way grew steeper, twisting back upon itself, a meander line up the hill—bobbing lights, dim shapes, chant, root stumbles in the path, paths, slippery places, cold air.

Bakrish whispered at Orne's ear: "You're not chanting!"

The sense of danger, his own feelings of being out of place, combined to fill Orne with rebellion. He whispered back: "I'm not in good voice tonight!"

Ah-hh-ah-huh! What utter nonsense. He felt like throwing the light down the hill and striding off into the night.

Line and chanting stopped so abruptly Orne almost collided with the priest ahead of him. Orne stumbled, regained his balance, straightened his pole to keep from hitting someone. People were bunching up all around him, moving off the trail. He followed, breaking a way through a low thicket. There was a shallow amphitheatre beyond the thicket, a stone stupa within it about the height of a man. Students began separating from the students, who formed a semicircle flowing down to the stupa. Their lights showed multicoloured reflections off the stones.

Where was Bakrish? Orne looked around, realized he had been separated from Bakrish. What was he supposed to do here? How could this show petty?

A bearded priest came from behind the stupa, stood in front of it. He wore a black robe, a three-cornered red hat. His eyes glistened in the light. The students grew silent.

Orne, standing in the outer ring, wondered how this could be part of an ordeal. What were they going to do?

The red-hatted priest spread his arms wide, lowered them. He spoke in a resonant bass voice: "You stand before the shrine of Purity and the Law. These are the two inseparables in all true belief. Purity and Law! Here is the key to the Great Mystery which leads on to paradise."

Orne felt the tension of his warning prescience and, now, the impact of an enormously swelling psi force. This psi was different, somehow, from what he had experienced before. It beat like a metronome with the cadence of the bearded priest's words, blossoming and amplifying as the passion of his speech increased.

Orne focused on the words: "... the immortal goodness and purity of all great prophets! The breath of eternal life for our salvation! Conceived in purity, born in purity, their thoughts ever bathed in purity! Untouched by base nature in all of their aspects, they show us the way!"

With a shock of realization, Orne recognized that this psi force and him now arose not from some machine, but from a mingling of emotions arising out of the massed listeners. He sensed the emotional content, subtle harmonics on the overriding psi field. The bearded priest played his audience like a musician playing his instrument.

Have faith in the eternal truth of this divine dogma! the priest shouted.



# THE TREE IN THE FOREST

Continued from page 3

gun lay nearby. Would the Bouncers allow him to pick it up? Yes, they would. He picked up the gun and considered blasting every Bouncer in the vicinity, but there seemed too many risks in it. For the moment, he decided, he'd be quite content to get back to the ship. Revenge could come later.

He covered twenty yards quickly and ducked out through the leaves, leaving the tree behind. The Bouncers made no move to stop him, and their inactivity somehow disturbed him. It hinted at a terrible confidence. Outside the clearing, Harding looked back once. The Bouncers were all following him – quietly, unobtrusively, at a distance. He entered the wood and still they followed him. Ten minutes later he had to stop and rest, for his legs felt like rubber beneath him. He leaned against a tree, suddenly noticing a strangeness about his face. He raised a tentative hand to his cheek, and then he had the most awful shock of his life.

The seeds were growing.

Within his flesh they were increasing in size quickly – almost quickly enough to be felt. Each seed was like a marble, hard and terrible beneath his skin. He could also feel long tendrils that had grown from the seeds, questing and sliding down deeper into his face and throat. He was doomed, and he knew it.

He shot the nearest Bouncer. It exploded in a loathsome squelch of torn flesh, and Harding saw red blood pour out onto the grass. Some of it was his own. That thought made him retch again, leaning heavily against a tree. He was sweating. Suddenly, viciously, the three Bouncers attacked him, fixing themselves painfully onto his ankles and shins. He smacked at them and kicked at them and ran for his life. After fifty yards they fell away from him and left him alone.

He sighed and almost smiled. And then he realised that they'd successfully managed to make him lose his gun. They learned quickly. He was alone and unarmed, in the middle of the wood with three Bouncers.

He didn't know where the ship was.

He began to limp away, stumbling and falling. He didn't know where he was going, but anywhere away from the Bouncers would be ideal. No matter how swiftly he ran, they kept up with him. No matter how much he zigzagged, they stuck with him. It took him twenty minutes to accept the fact that he would never be free from them.

The seeds were still growing, deep inside him. He could feel hard round shapes that pushed against his flesh from the inside. His cheeks were puffed and bleeding. He could only close his mouth halfway. One of his eyes was closed. Worst of all, two seed-tendrils had grown back through his flesh, bursting through again towards the outside light. Two tiny-leaved shoots hung from the wounds in the side of his throat. He knew that he couldn't go much further.

He carried on through the wood, until he came to the extreme edge. Here, the trees ceased and a hilly grassland took over. His biggest problem was which direction to take. Forward, left, right, or back into the wood? He was trying anxiously to make up his mind when it was painfully made up for him. The Bouncers began to attack his legs again. They seemed to be acting with precision and organisation, as if they had some plan. He jumped back from their savage assaults and began to run. His legs were heavy, his strides very short. The Bouncers kept up with him easily, snapping at his heels now and then like dogs. Yard by yard they forced him away from the wood, out into the grasslands, farther and farther from companionship and help. Inch by inch, they were killing him. He knew that death was very close, and all the time it was getting closer.

The Bouncers drove him slowly across the grassland, and then the grim significance dawned on him. It was a cold, horrible shock. The Bouncers were driving him, herding him, forcing him to go their way as would a sheepdog with its flock. They were making him go exactly where they wanted him to. He realised that he'd been lured to the tree for some particular purpose, as had his three colleagues. And then he'd been cunningly forced away from the tree, through the wood, out into the grassland. And still they were herding him, snapping at his legs, driving him yard by yard towards death.

So that was what the second of the missing men had meant in his final message. His message had come from the edge of the clearing in which the tree stood. "There's thousands of them in the trees. I can't get back. They won't let me."

Harding noticed that the ground was rising gradually towards a darkening horizon. He knew that night was close, and that he would never see morning. Somewhere in the night, Death waited for him in some form or other. He would never again see the ship nor his friends nor his home. He had to die.

He wondered how death would come. Obviously the Bouncers had some objective, some alien purpose in what they were doing. They were taking

him somewhere, and he knew by cold instinct that he was nearing the end of the road. The truth was as obvious as death. Even so, it hurt to admit it.

A few stars were appearing in the evening sky as they reached the top of the hill. Harding looked down the gentle slope of the hill's far side, seeing a large patch of darkness against the grayness of the grasses. It looked like a wood, though it was only a very small one. The Bouncers bit and sucked and savaged him with a sudden increase in fierceness and agility, causing him to stumble down the hill in a haze of pain and fear. He was drawing nearer the wood. Agony tore across his face and throat, a burning fire in which the seeds were like small, fiery rocks. All the previous numbness had worn off, so that he face felt like the torn, bleeding travesty it really was. He began to cry.

He staggered through the twilight, closer and closer to the place where he knew he must meet Death. He wanted to turn and kick at his tormentors, but there was no energy in him for fighting. All his will was spent, and there was only dark despair and a heavy sense of defeat.

The wood was not a wood. He could see more clearly now that he was very close – not well enough to pick out details, yet distinctly enough to be able to see that the wood was not a wood. It was a tree – or, rather, a group of trees some dozen in number. They were the same kind as the tree in the clearing. None of the trees was large. Four or five ten-foot saplings grew in the centre, and around them Harding could see vague bulks that looked like smaller, younger trees.

Harding drove even closer to the young tree-mass, then finally he was standing right in the midst of them, staring around him in horror. Night had almost fallen, yet there remained sufficient light for him to see things. And seeing, he almost went mad.

He was in the middle of a chancel scene more frightful than any nightmare. Nothing in his imagination had ever prepared him for this. Around him lay the bodies of all his three friends, mutilated and indescribable. He had just strength to whimper. There were also several other bodies – the putrid, horrible corpses of various native animals, all ravaged beyond belief. Harding felt himself sobbing and crying again. He knew it was a foolish and childish thing to do, and he knew that it was useless to cry, and he knew that he couldn't help himself. He glanced at the corpses again, but his throat was too torn for him to manage a scream. He could only sob.

A tree grew from each body. Harding could see thick roots protruding from the dry flesh of his comrades, disappearing into the ground around them. Similarly, slender trunks stood upright from the sundered bodies of men and animals alike, clutching at the sky like demon fingers. None of the men's faces was recognisable, for most of the seeds had taken hold in the soft flesh of the cheeks and throat. Harding touched his own face, feeling long shoots springing up from fresh ruptures. The pain had all gone now, horror was all that was left.

To see his fellow men in such a state left him cold with terror. Yet to know that he himself must soon share their fate was more than he could bear. He looked wordlessly at the Bouncers, all grouped close to his feet.

He didn't even kick at them. He merely stared at them with icy distaste and a kind of mindless calm. There was almost a dignity in the manner in which he waited for their attack. He didn't wait long.

Suddenly they were on him, tearing at his legs until his mind rocked and the ground came up and hit him. He was down, knowing that he would never arise. The Bouncers seemed to know this, too, for they left him there to die. They went away, and Harding realised that their part was played. He was alone, lying in the centre of a stench and horror beyond all reason. He knew that it was ingenious – ingenious and, in a strange alien way, logical. There were few insects and no birds on the planet, and the only winds were steady breezes that appeared rarely. Thus the local vegetation must long ago have faced a problem, and at least one tree had come up with an adequate answer. The problem was seed-dispersal . . . and the answer was deadfall.

Harding didn't know exactly what the Bouncers were. They might have been animals living in a grim symbiosis with the trees, attracting seed-hosts and then driving them away to fresh ground. For this service, they would have a more or less free hand with the hosts during such time as these hosts were unconscious from the initial falling of the seeds. Or, alternatively, they might well have been entirely vegetable organisms, an integral part of the tree itself. Or again, they could have been part-animal and part-vegetable. He didn't know.

Nor could he really care. All he knew for certain was that he was the tree's most recent victim. It had killed him. He wasn't dead yet, but it had killed him just the same. Perhaps a minute, perhaps an hour, perhaps . . .

So this is what it is like to die, he thought almost objectively. There was a vast curiosity about death, a great burning interest that consumed him. There was also a dim dark fear. And the pain had come back, now that he could feel death on his horizon – a tearing, damp, red pain that was slowly pulling him apart. His face was in shreds, his throat a gaping crimson hole. Long tendrils were writhing, twisting, ripping, under him, over him, inside him, like bloodied, sodden snakes that slowly sipped his life away. The night washed over him, and the darkness seemed symbolic. He felt his own blood warm and prickly on his flesh. He felt rudimentary roots thrusting from his body and ploughing down, down, down into the ground. He felt pain and fear and despair.

After a while he didn't feel anything.

## STOP PRESS . . . READERS' LETTERS

I would like to thank all of you who have written to us about the first issue of SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY. A selection of your letters will be published in next month's issue, on sale March 26th.

The Editor

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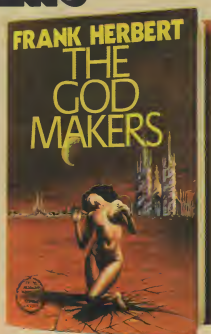
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